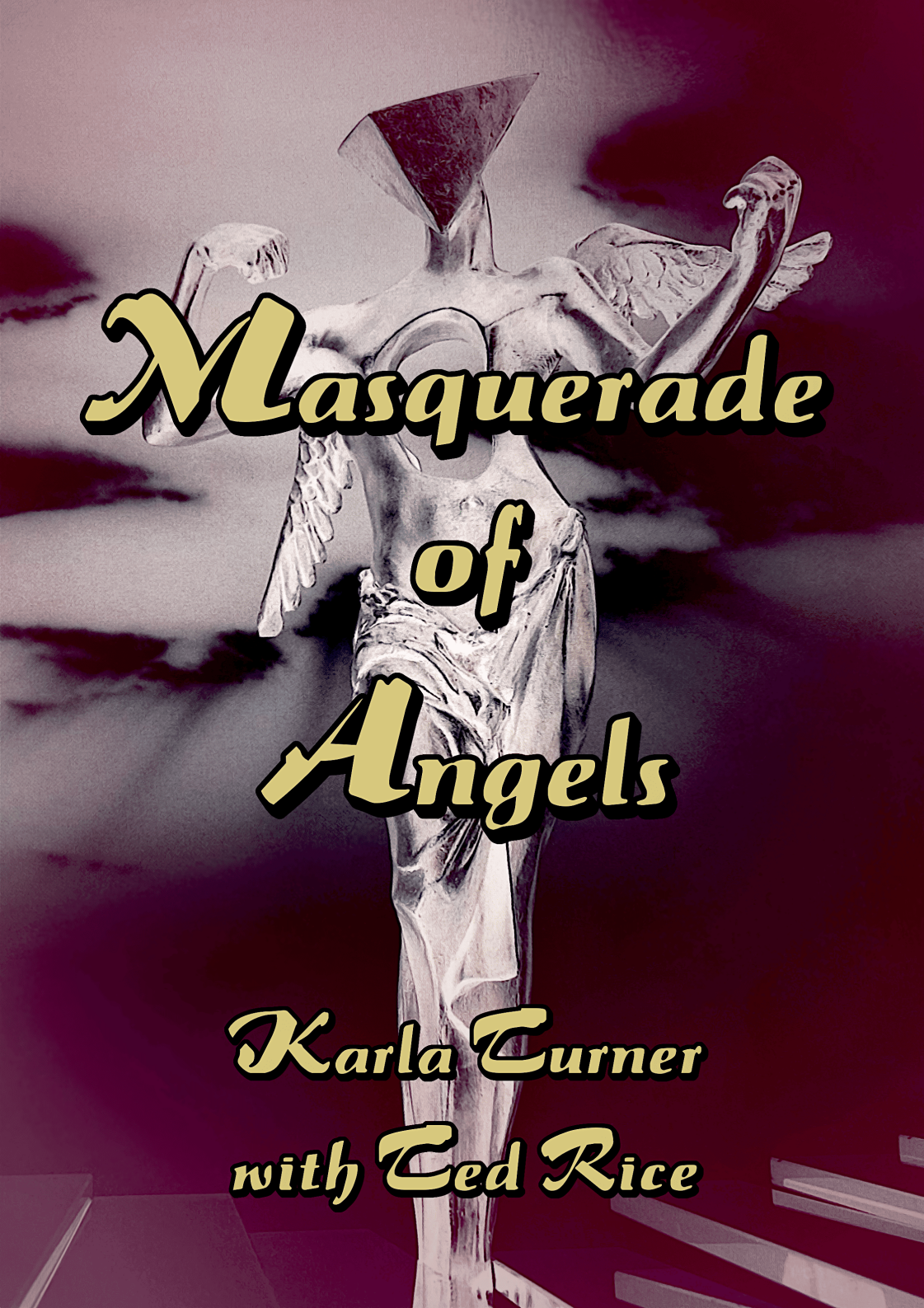

Masquerade
of
Angels
Karla Turner
with Ted Rice

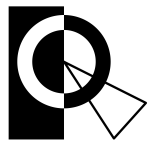
Masquerade of Angels

Karla Turner, Ph.D.

with

Ted Rice

Foreword by Barbara Bartholic



REVOLUTION

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Foreword

Midday sun through the wall of glass illuminated my office as I sat contemplating the beauty of autumn and the willow branches softly skimming the pond, laden with ducks. The harsh tone of the phone abruptly jolted me from my reverie, but the voice on the other end was the welcome sound of my colleague and confidant, Dr. Karla Turner. She began to relate details regarding a man who consciously recalled a group alien abduction encounter. Having documented a similar case in a rural area on the outskirts of Tulsa, I readily agreed to help her research the case.

November third, two weeks after Dr. Turner's initial call, Ted Rice stepped over my threshold, and secure reality as we once had both known it was never to be the same again.

At first glance you sense his intelligent, warm personal demeanor. Shortly thereafter, I came to appreciate his infectious style of humor that would leave a living room audience begging for mercy during one of his numerous side-splitting comedic routines. Paradoxically, the serious side of Ted Rice reveals an extraordinary psychic, sensitive ability which allows him to peer through the veiled, darkened corridors into an alien netherworld.

Yes, we asked to see the truth, knowing 'the truth would set us free.' Yet neither one of us was prepared for the discoveries about to be revealed. I have investigated hundreds of abduction reports through the years, documenting evidence that in most cases has been recovered only in partial, incomplete glimpses of the events. The memories of these events are consistently blurred by strata of confusing and misleading screens which prevent the abductees from discovering the actual nature of their encounters. And I have developed methods that assist abductees to penetrate these screens.

Foreword

Working with Ted to peel back the layers of deceptive illusions and probe the depths of consciousness required long hours of concentrated focus. The intense ordeal revealed a man of tremendous courage, willing to trust, willing repeatedly to subject himself to the mental torture chamber in which the truth became reality. And even when that reality brought him close to an emotional crisis, Ted Rice persisted through agonizing hours of tears and recollections as he worked toward recovery and recognition. Through his unceasing effort and determination, we have all gained a greater understanding of this illusive alien relationship with humankind.

Barbara Bartholic
Tulsa, Oklahoma
September 1994

Introduction

Destiny. Karma. God's plan for your life.

Whatever you want to call it, there is a force at work—or at large—in this world that can move us around like pieces on a boardgame. Most of us go through life thinking that we are in control of things, hardly aware of subtle touches from fate's hand. In the disguise of coincidence, it rarely reveals itself. But in the lives of some people, these manipulations are more direct, more blatant, and often more terrifying than our worst nightmares.

As a researcher into a phenomenon of highest strangeness, the abduction of humans by non-human beings, I have talked with many sane people whose experiences include bizarre encounters with 'alien' entities performing physical procedures on them and delivering messages of predictions, warnings, and esoteric information. In most of these cases, alien encounters seem to be rare intrusions into an otherwise normal life.

But in the case of Ted Rice, a gifted psychic, the pattern of planned manipulation in his life has been consistent. When I began investigating his experiences, I had no reason to think this case would be any different from hundreds of others. Delving into his background, however, I soon discovered that almost everything in his life had been shaped by an external force. Where he lived, the people he met, the work he performed, even the details of his dreams—all was directed toward molding Ted into a very unique individual, possessed of paranormal abilities, whose course through life has been propelled by the most extraordinary events.

In the course of this investigation, Barbara Bartholic and I interviewed almost thirty people who had first-hand knowledge of Ted's various experiences and who had in many

instances been personally involved in the events in this book.

Hypnotic regressions were performed with some of these people, eliciting more information, and signed affidavits from all of the principle characters are on file attesting to their permission for the accounts presented here.

For purposes of confidentiality, however, many of the names used in *MASQUERADE OF ANGELS* are pseudonyms, and for purposes of simplicity, a few of the characters are composite figures. But all of the incidents are presented exactly as they occurred. My own involvement in Ted's life was an inevitable part of the investigative process, because his experiences continued to occur in the course of our research. In retelling his story, I have referred to myself as a third-person participant, in order to keep the focus squarely on Ted.

It is clear now that Ted Rice has been 'designed.' But by whom, and for what purpose? The story of his life, unfolded in the following pages, explores these questions. And because that story involves both the realm of psychic, paranormal activities and the realm of UFOs and alien abductions, it also gives us new and disturbing insights into phenomena that affect thousands of people around the world.

Although it may read like science fiction, Ted's story is true. His experiences occurred within a reality we all share, and what we learn from this account may tell us more about the hidden nature of that reality than we ever wanted to know.

Part One

The Siege

Ships dim-discovered dropping from the clouds.
James Thomson

It looked as if a night of dark intent
Was coming, and not only a night, an age.
Frost

One

O tribe of spirits and of men, if you are able to slip through the parameters of the skies and the earth, then do so. You shall not pass through them save with my authority.

Koran

"The cancer is terminal," Felicia Brown said, fighting back tears. "God, Ted, what am I going to do? Jim's too young to die now. Our daughter is just a baby, she won't even remember him."

Ted Rice listened in sympathy and took his friend's hand. Sitting beside her in his living room, he paused in the quiet of the evening and searched for the right words.

"It's hard to understand why God lets these things happen," Ted said, "but there has to be a purpose that those of us down here just don't perceive. You love him and need him in your life on this earthly plane, I know. But it may be that Jim has fulfilled his mission here, and his higher self realizes it's time to ascend to the spiritual world. All things must work for the good, Felicia, we've got to believe that's true."

It wasn't much comfort right now, Ted realized, but there was little else he could say. Felicia was still emotionally stunned. Her usual bearing, as an attractive, vivacious young woman whose profession kept her in the public eye, was gone, and Ted empathized deeply with the pain of the frightened, numb, exhausted woman who now sat slumped on the couch beside him.

"I remember the day you warned me about this," Felicia sighed, shaking her head slowly. "That was the first time I came to you for a psychic reading. I didn't believe anything you said, not about the baby and certainly not about Jim."

"Yeah, I remember," Ted said. "You walked up and asked me if I was the psychic, like you thought you had the wrong person."

"I don't know what I was expecting," Felicia replied, "but you sure weren't it."

"Thanks a lot," Ted smiled. "So I'm short, round, balding, and bespectacled. Wouldn't I look great in a cloak and turban, squinting into a crystal ball through my bifocals?"

"It wouldn't have helped," Felicia said. "I thought you were crazy when you told me I was going to have a child, a little girl. All the doctors said my chances of conceiving were nearly zero."

"But the spirit guide showed me the child," Ted shrugged. "I don't have any control over what I see. Good or bad, it's whatever the spirits choose to reveal."

Although he had been doing psychic readings for twenty years, Ted still didn't understand the process, and he was as amazed as his clients when the information proved to be accurate.

"Yeah, and six months later, when I found out I was pregnant, you made a believer out of me," Felicia said. "But I just didn't think about the other things you told me."

"That's the hardest part of what I do," Ted replied. "When I see wonderful events in the future, like the birth of your daughter, I feel really good about my abilities. But there's always a balance in life, and sometimes I foresee very sad events, I can't help it. That first time I read for you, I sensed serious health problems coming in around your husband."

"You said I should get him to the doctor for a check- up," Felicia nodded.

"I wasn't shown enough to know for certain what the problem might be," Ted said, "but I did see you leaving town in about five years, and your husband wasn't with you. The images, the vibrations I was feeling, made me believe he just wasn't going to make it. I'm so sorry, Felicia."

A knock at the door interrupted them, and Ted went over to let Beverly Michaels enter.

"Hi, Felicia," Beverly said. "Good to see you again. I

won't keep you very long, Ted, but I wanted to stop by and tell you what's just happened. You won't believe it!"

"Come on in and tell me, then," Ted said. "You're pretty excited."

"Remember when you were telling our UFO study group about the lessons you've been getting from the ETs?" Beverly began. "About how to manifest the things we need?"

"Sure," Ted replied. "That's one of the things they keep stressing, that under natural law we have the right to manifest whatever we want, so long as it doesn't interfere with our life's mission."

"Wait," Felicia interrupted, "explain it to me. I wasn't there when you talked about that, I guess."

"Well, you know I've been having some ET visits at night," he began, "and when they're with me, I'm not very aware of what's going on. But the next morning I can remember a little of what they tell me. Part of the lessons were about how to ask for and manifest things in this plane of existence. When I started trying it, I didn't understand how it worked, but I learned the hard way.

"At the time when I was getting all these lessons at night," Ted continued, "I needed a second car. So I decided that I'd try to manifest one, like the ETs told me I could do. I meditated and visualized a car being given to me, and lo and behold, it happened! A woman, someone I just knew casually, offered to give me her old car when she bought another one, and I took it."

"So the ETs were right?" Felicia asked.

"Sure, I got the car," Ted chuckled, "just like I asked for. But apparently I didn't make my request clear enough. I should have asked for a car that actually worked! The one that woman gave me was a pile of junk! It would have cost more to repair the wreck than it was worth. And not only that, but once the woman had given me the car, she seemed to think she had bought me. She started moving right into my life, and I had a heck of a time getting her back out of it.

"What I learned," he concluded, "is that you have to make a very specific, precise, clear request. You can't just visualize money, for example. You should ask for the exact

amount that you need."

"You explained that to the group," Beverly said, "and do you remember what I decided to ask for?"

"Yes, I think you said you wanted a VCR," Ted nodded. "And I told you to visualize the specific brand you had in mind."

"A Panasonic," she confirmed.

"And I told you to request that you get the VCR with no strings attached," Ted laughed. "After what happened with me and the car, that seemed the safest thing to do."

"Right," Beverly said, "and that's just what I did. So guess what's happened? My daughter just came home from Saudi Arabia, where her husband works in the oil business. And she has $50,000 from the bonus he got when he renegotiated his contract! She said she wants to buy me something, whatever I most want. It's an unconditional gift, Ted, exactly what I requested less than three months ago."

"It's fantastic the way the ETs interact with you, Ted," Felicia said. "You're so lucky that they've chosen you."

"I guess so," Ted replied uncertainly. "But I'm still not sure what to think about them. You know, through all these years of psychic work, I've believed that my helpers were strictly part of the spiritual plane. They were God's agents, so I knew they were pure and benevolent. But UFOs and aliens? That's all pretty new to me."

"And surely they must be benevolent, too," Beverly told him. "Look at all the wonderful things they've taught you. I've read a lot of books about aliens, and from what they tell the people they contact here on earth, they want to help us. You're a perfect example, Ted. You've been given special psychic abilities and you use them to help people. Don't you think the ETs have something to do with that?"

"All I ever knew in the past were spirit guides," Ted insisted, "but the beings who've come to see me recently are different."

"Maybe so, or maybe you're seeing them more clearly than before?" Felicia offered.

"And anyway," Beverly continued, "they teach you about spiritual matters, don't they? That shows their benevolence

towards us."

"It's possible, I guess," Ted conceded. "These alien beings do give me a lot of information about metaphysical matters. But, look, you both know as well as I do that spirits don't need to fly around in UFOs, like some of the creatures that have been coming to me. What if their agenda isn't spiritual?"

"Impossible," Beverly argued, "because universal law won't allow negative beings to harm us. Besides, everything the ETs have done has been positive and wonderful. They're trying to help humanity, not hurt us."

"God's still in charge of the universe," Felicia agreed. "Like you said, all things must work for the good."

Ted didn't argue with the women, but later when he was alone he couldn't help wondering if his friends were right. He had always tried his best to follow the wishes of the spirits, and many times he had seen good results come from his work.

So why, he wondered, did he have such a feeling of fear each time these alien entities visited him? Why did they seem so dreamlike and shadowy? He couldn't remember much about their visits, so why was he too nervous to sleep at night without sedatives, dreading his next encounter? If all of his metaphysical beliefs were true and cosmic law forbade the intrusive actions of negative beings, then the aliens, whatever they were, must be compatible with God's higher spiritual plan for humanity. That's how it should be, Ted insisted to himself, but he couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong.

Before he moved to Shreveport, Louisiana, in 1988, Ted gave very little thought to UFOs. His training in spiritualist philosophy taught him nothing about the subject. He had no reason to think there were any forces, other than those of the spiritual realm, involved in his life.

Indeed, it had been through a psychic message that Ted was told he'd be moving to Louisiana, where God's universal forces wanted him to continue his mission of helping people progress upward, beyond the limits of the material world. Through his psychic readings, which served to demonstrate

the reality of the spiritual plane, Ted motivated others to seek enlightenment, that state of truth and awareness in which the soul is free and at one with God. He carried out his work with humility, giving all the credit to higher forces.

After relocating to Shreveport, where he settled into a quiet mobile home park, he wasted no time in finding a place where he could pursue his psychic work. A local bookstore proved to be ideal. Ted was accessible there to an intelligent, curious clientele, many of whom were already attuned to ideas about the paranormal. For a year he did an average of five readings a week, coming to know some of the regular customers very well.

They were a diverse, intelligent group of people whose interests, Ted soon realized, extended to other subjects than the psychic. Sometimes they discussed UFOs, and he listened with great curiosity. There were a few events in his own past that he'd never been able to explain, even to himself, and some of the things he now heard made him question those experiences all over again. As Ted listened, he began to accept the idea that perhaps UFOs and aliens might exist, but by no means was he convinced.

His new friends, however, paid a lot of attention to the subject, bringing up many unfamiliar names and places, openly discussing their beliefs. They told Ted that the ETs were wonderful, benevolent beings from other worlds, or perhaps some other dimension, here to help us through coming times of trouble.

Ted agreed that the planet's condition was terrible, and he really had no argument with their faith in the aliens' ability to rescue us from catastrophe. Having never thought about such things before, he listened more than he talked at first, curious to understand the UFO phenomenon. And even though his friends managed to blend their ideas about aliens harmoniously into their larger metaphysical views, Ted couldn't help questioning the relationship of the two. If aliens were real, he wondered, why had his guides never told him about them? Were they spirit, like angels or souls of the dead, or were they physical beings?

Such questions were entertaining to discuss with Felicia,

Beverly, and the others, but they didn't dominate Ted's thoughts. For the most part, he focused his energy on the psychic readings, until something set off a change in his contacts with the spirit world. After his move to Shreveport, the guidance and information he'd always received from the spirit helpers seemed to intensify. Where before, he'd received messages while in a deliberate, meditative trance state, now the spirits came to him in a different and disturbing way.

It started in 1989 when he began to wake up in the night, sensing strange entities around him but unable to understand their communications. When these visits were over, Ted felt agitated and had trouble getting back to sleep. And then the disturbances grew more palpable. He awoke frequently, startled from rest by the touch of invisible hands on his face, stroking his hair, brushing against his arms or legs. Deprived of sleep, he took medication in order to rest for a few nights, and then he'd discontinue it. But exhaustion inevitably drove him back to using the sleeping aids.

And no matter what he did, the visitations continued relentlessly night after night, jarring his nerves and leading to mental and physical fatigue. Ted was familiar with spirits delivering messages, but these new spirits, if that's what they were, spoke to him of things he couldn't grasp or even clearly remember. And he didn't like the feeling of their touch on his body.

Eventually, his health deteriorated. Ted recognized all the signs—jittery nerves, fear of the dark, restlessness, inability to sleep without sedatives. These were the same symptoms he had back in the 1970s. He had ignored them, until fear and exhaustion drove him into voluntary retreat in a psychiatric unit, and he didn't want to make that mistake again.

But he didn't know what to do to change the situation. Dedicated to his work, believing that his psychic gifts should be used to guide others to an understanding of God's reality and plan for humanity, he strove to continue with the readings. Yet, constantly intruded upon by the nighttime visitors, Ted felt his strength and concentration ebbing away.

Two

Some alien blessing is on its way to us.
W. S. Merwin

"I don't know what I'm going to do," Ted said wearily to his friend, Bud Stockton, after yet another restless night. "This can't keep up, it's killing me."

"Why don't you move?" Bud suggested. "You said this stuff didn't start until you got here, so maybe if you moved away from this spot, you'd have some peace."

"I've tried everything else," Ted agreed. "What have I got to lose?"

He inquired at the park office and learned that a space had come open recently in a different area, so Ted took it. Bud helped him move, and for the next four nights after work, the two men set up the trailer, unpacked, and reorganized Ted's belongings. They were too busy to explore the new area or even speak to the neighbors there, and when the huge job was finished, Bud and Ted collapsed in exhaustion.

"Thanks for all your help," Ted said. "It's pretty late, so why don't you stay here tonight? I could use the company."

"What's the matter?" Bud asked. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah, sure," Ted replied, but the more he thought about being there alone, the more uneasy he became.

Bud agreed to stay, which should have calmed Ted, yet as bedtime approached he felt even more anxious. Nervously, he turned on the television, and they sat down in the living room to watch.

"Hey! Did you see that?" Ted suddenly shouted, jumping up from his chair.

"What?" Bud asked, looking around.

"That flash of light!" Ted told him. "Oh, God, is it starting up again already?"

"Don't go over the edge," Bud said, aware of the strain Ted had been feeling for weeks. "You need to stop working at the bookstore for a while, you need to quit those readings and try to come down out of the stars and be human again. Tell your spirit friends to go take a vacation and give you a rest. You've got to calm down!"

But it was too late, and all Ted's built-up frustrations erupted. In anger he stormed through the house, shouting at the intruders and cursing them for disturbing his sleep so constantly.

"Here I am!" he shouted, "trying to do my spiritual work, to help people! But you keep me worn out, talking to me all the time and trying to teach me whatever this stuff is I keep hearing from you. You're not considering me! I need my rest, and you won't let me sleep. I've had it with you! I'm not going to do any more readings right now, I can't handle it any more. My body and my mind need some rest, and you little bastards won't leave me alone at night. How in the hell do you think I can do this work you want me to do, when you won't let me rest?

"You better back off and leave me alone for a while, or I might just quit doing it permanently," he threatened. "Go pick on the neighbors, why don't you? Go teach them your lessons for a change, and leave me alone tonight!" he finished, stomping off into his bedroom and slamming the door.

Physically and emotionally worn out, Ted fell asleep right away, but soon afterwards he awoke and wondered if the whole world had gone crazy. He sat up in shock, watching his bedroom wall, wavy and shimmery, dissolving before his eyes.

"This has to be a dream," he told himself, as the wall suddenly disappeared altogether. He could see outside the mobile home quite clearly. Stunned, Ted watched as three small, gray beings came through the invisible wall toward him. He was frozen with fear, and although his mind was functioning, he couldn't cry out the terror he felt.

One of the little beings reached out to touch him, and his

fear instantly disappeared. They escorted him through the wall and out into the dark yard. A fourth being was waiting there, at the controls of some sort of hovering 'sled' device. Ted and the three beings stepped onto the sled and floated away, a few feet above the ground, over the yard and into an open field beyond the tall trees.

There he saw a large, silver-gray, circular craft in the field, surrounded by brilliant light. The sled stopped about fifty feet from the object, and Ted was led into the craft. As he approached, he noticed a number of other sleds floating toward him, coming from several homes down the street, and each carried one of his neighbors. They arrived, and Ted and the others were taken into the large UFO, up a ramp into a central room. As they crowded in together, Ted was positioned in the middle of the group.

One of the gray beings walked up to him and mentally asked, "Is this correct? Is this what you wanted?"

But before he could reply, the craft seemed to rise up from the ground, and at that point Ted blacked out. The next thing he remembered was being transported back to his house in the UFO and seeing the other neighbors each being returned as well. He was fascinated by the process. At each home the craft hovered overhead, and the person being returned stepped onto a grate-type area. From there, a track of light carried the person, along with an accompanying gray being, straight into the mobile home below. The gray entity returned alone, and the craft moved to the next location, repeating the process. Ted was the last person delivered home.

When he awoke the next morning, he recalled the experience quite vividly. He even remembered having a conversation with some of the gray beings when he was returned, and the way they touched him and thanked him for doing something. He didn't know what it was that he might have done, however, for he recalled nothing of the time between his blackout on the craft and his return trip home from the event.

Or the dream, if it had been just a dream. Whatever it was, he couldn't understand what message or information

this scenario was meant to deliver. His spirit guides in the past had never done such things, and Ted was truly bewildered.

"What a dream!" he thought, "I can't believe it!" And when Bud awoke a little later, Ted recounted the entire bizarre experience.

"You know," he finished, "when they took me into the ship, I had the feeling that these gray beings were almost familiar, like I'd known them before. And they seemed to know me, too. At least, I remember they acknowledged me in a way, and welcomed me."

"Yeah, sure," Bud joked, "you and your psychic dreams. That's what you get for listening to those women at the bookstore. You all sit around talking about UFOs, and now you're having dreams about them."

"You're probably right," Ted said, gazing out the window. "But you know, I've only been over in this part of the mobile home park for four days, I don't really know the area. Look, over there across the road," he gestured. "I think that's where they took me. We can't see it from here, but if I'm right, there's a big, open field just beyond there."

Bud stepped to the window and peered out. "No," he shook his head, "there's nothing but woods out there, just a lot of trees."

"I'm telling you," Ted insisted, "in my dream we went through those trees, and behind there is a big, open field. After we have some coffee, let's go over there and take a look."

Bud agreed rather dubiously to go with Ted, but a rain storm arose, keeping them indoors. Intense wet weather continued for several days, frustrating Ted's desire to explore the area beyond the trees. A few times he and Bud actually started out, crossing the road and the trailer sites that lay between them and the woods, but there was too much water and mud to allow them passage.

When dry weather finally returned, Ted and Bud did check out the area, and sure enough, just as Ted had seen in his dream, a large field lay hidden on the other side of the tree line. Looking around, they saw no sign of a craft having

been there, no landing traces, so Ted tried to dismiss the odd experience as a psychic dream rather than an actual event. Even so, he couldn't deny how totally real the whole episode had seemed at the time.

And, at some deep emotional level, how very disturbing. His focus was shaken, so much so that Ted temporarily withdrew from doing his psychic work and kept a rather low profile for a while. Was it a coincidence that the disruptive nighttime intrusions by the invisible spirits also stopped at that time? Ted didn't know, but he was grateful for the chance to catch up on his rest and to let his mind and body recover from the long months of fatigue. Best of all, there were no more voices talking to him during the night, and no sensations of being touched.

When Ted finally felt strong enough to resume the psychic readings, he said nothing to his friends about the strange dream. And Bud, the only witness to his agitation the morning after, didn't bring it up, so Ted put the whole thing out of his mind as best he could. His rational side insisted that the dream sprang from conversations about UFOs among his friends at the bookstore, and dreams, even such vivid ones, proved nothing.

"Let it go," he told himself, "just go on with your life."

There was plenty to keep him occupied. His position in the credit office of a large company demanded constant attention, and his reputation as a psychic, which grew rapidly in the area, brought in as many clients as he could manage. He was so busy, in fact, that it was several months after moving to the new location before Ted got around to meeting his neighbors. Almost all of the original families on his street had begun moving away shortly after his UFO dream–he'd been surprised by the number of "For Sale" signs that popped up the next week–so by the time Ted started meeting people in the neighborhood, only his mobile home and one other remained of the original neighborhood.

The family who lived across the street were amiable people, and Ted enjoyed visiting them and their young children. One evening he sat out on his patio talking with Susie and her husband, while the children, a daughter of four or five

and a son around two years old, played nearby. As they chatted, the conversation was interrupted by Bud, who was spending a few days with Ted.

"Hey!" he called out from the porch, "*Unsolved Mysteries* is coming on TV, and they're going to show some material about UFOs. Do you want to come in and watch it?"

"Yeah," Ted replied, "I do want to see it. I'll be right in." He turned to the young couple and asked, "How about you? Want to come watch it with me?"

"Sure," Susie agreed, and the adults went inside for the program, while the children stayed out playing.

After the presentation, when Susie got up to leave, she said, "You know, that show reminds me of something. Back last spring, my daughter told us the strangest story, about a night the little spacemen came and took everybody for a ride."

Ted looked at her in disbelief. "What do you mean?" he asked, "they took everybody for a ride?" Scanning back quickly, he realized that his dream had been in April.

"You know that field out behind the woods over there?" Susie said, pointing to the tree line. "Heidi told us some spacemen came one night and took her and a bunch of other people out in that field to their rocket. She said they took everybody for a ride."

Bud and Ted stared at each other nervously.

"Susie," Ted finally said, "do you think you can get Heidi in here and let her tell me about that herself?"

Heidi came in and willingly repeated the story for Ted. "The rocket was round," she explained, "and there were lots and lots of other people there. You were there, too, I think you were. I didn't know all the people, though."

"Why did you go with those spacemen?" Ted asked. "Weren't you afraid?"

"Well, I told them I couldn't go out at night," Heidi replied, "unless my mommy says it's all right. But they made me go anyway."

"How did they make you go?" he pressed.

"They put their fingers into my mouth," she demonstrated, "and they pulled me like that, out to the rocket. That's

how they made me go."

"What happened after you went riding on the rocket?"

"I don't remember," Heidi shrugged.

Ted turned to Susie. "Exactly when was it that Heidi told you about this?" he asked. "Can you remember?"

"Yeah," she nodded. "It was back in the spring, early April, I think."

"And that's when you had your dream," Bud commented.

"What dream?" Susie asked.

After hearing Heidi's story, Ted felt compelled to tell her parents about his UFO dream, and they weren't happy to hear it.

"We just thought Heidi had been dreaming, too," Susie said, shaking her head, "but now I don't know what to think. Can things like that really happen?"

Before Ted could reply, Susie continued. "Oh, I just remembered something else," she said excitedly. "My eighteen-year-old cousin was in town visiting us during that weekend. He was sleeping on the sofa in the living room. And when we got up the next morning, he told us that he had seen some strange children in the living room during the night."

"Could there really have been kids in the house?" Ted asked, but Susie shook her head.

"No," she answered, "and we didn't know what he was talking about. He said he woke up and saw a soft, pale bluish light everywhere, and there were some kids running around in the room. He even said he sat up on the couch and talked to them, but he couldn't remember what anyone said."

It wasn't enough for Susie to tell him these things. Ted wanted to hear it directly from her cousin, so a phone call was made, and for the second time that evening Ted heard confirmation of at least part of his dream. Only now, he realized, he couldn't call it a dream any longer.

Three

Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables,
that he may run that readeth it.
Habakkuk

With this new confirmation, Ted reluctantly accepted the possibility that his disturbing "dream" reflected a real event. And his instinctive response to that was not a happy one. Since it seemed to involve UFOs and their little gray occupants, he decided to tell his friends at the bookstore about the experience. His opportunity came the next Saturday when he was there waiting in his small office for the next client to arrive and listening to a conversation among several of his friends in an adjacent room.

"Did you see the TV special the other night about cattle mutilations up in Arkansas?" one woman asked. "It showed all these dead cows with missing parts. Some had their tails cored out and parts of the jaw cut away. And there was one with the uterus removed by some type of unknown surgical procedure, maybe a laser, that literally cut between the cell layers."

Intrigued, Ted stepped out of his office. "Did they say anything about why these cattle were being mutilated?" he asked.

"No," the woman replied. "They didn't say it was definitely aliens, they gave several possibilities. But we know the ETs are responsible."

"Why would aliens be interested in cows?" Ted asked.

"I'd say they're studying the different species on our planet," a second woman said. "Probably they're looking for ways to improve the nutrition we get from beef. They

may even be genetically engineering a new cattle breed to withstand the coming earth changes, so that the human race can be assured of survival."

"We can't prove it's ETs," the first woman added, "but it must be them. Common sense tells you that our government would stop it if it were only thieves. Besides, rustlers would want the whole cow, not just a cored-out rectum."

Everyone laughed, including Ted, and she continued. "I think the ETs do their experiments to help mankind," she said. "Word has gotten around the universe about how wicked the human race is, and how self-destructive, and they want to help us clean it all up."

"I hope you're right," Ted replied, "but I don't understand why the ETs don't just land outright and tell us what they want. Why all the secrecy?"

"Look, Ted," a young man explained, "you know how humans are. If the ETs land, the first thing humans would do is get their guns and start shooting. We're just not spiritually evolved enough to handle a massive close encounter. The whole world would panic, and the ETs know it. That's why they behave in the manner they do. They're here to teach us, not scare us. They know better than to just land."

"Well, they sure as hell scared me," he replied, pouring out the story of his abduction with the neighbors.

His friends reacted with excitement and elation.

"I'm not surprised," one of them remarked. "Some of the things you've told us made me wonder if you weren't having alien contacts. How marvelous! You're obviously a special person, a chosen person."

"I don't know why this happened to me," Ted said. "I don't know anything about ETs, and to tell you the truth, the whole thing scared the living shit out of me. I don't want them coming back to my house, or kidnapping me and my neighbors again. Why did they pick me?"

"You're trying to make it too complicated, Ted," the first woman said, "but it's really quite simple. You weren't kidnapped, nor were your neighbors. ETs don't kidnap people, they make contact with them. They've probably been helping you a long time, and you just didn't know it. I'm sure your

spirit guides allowed the ETs to make contact. They would have warned you if it weren't okay."

"The ETs know you are here in this incarnation on a psychic mission to help humanity," her friend agreed, "and they're assisting you. I think it's very beautiful. Who knows what they may be teaching you?"

"You think that it's my psychic abilities that attracted them to me?" Ted asked. "You think they're going to lead me and teach me things like in the *Close Encounters* movie? Well, you can think again! I don't care if my abilities do interest them, I don't remember inviting them into my bedroom in the middle of the night to scare the hell out of me. Where are their manners?

"With their technology," he continued, "I do believe they could call before dropping in. You can say whatever you want, but I'm telling you right now that there is something about this whole thing that stinks to high heaven. I don't like it, and I don't want any part of it."

"You're overreacting," she said, "and besides, you can't do anything about it. Your higher self gave permission for it on some level, probably before you were reincarnated. It's all been planned, so you may as well kick back and enjoy it."

"Maybe so," Ted hedged, "but I know one thing. They better start knocking before entering if they want my help. If it was all that wonderful, like you say, why couldn't I sleep at night? I want to know what happened to me from the time we left the field until the time I was brought back home, too, because I don't remember any part of that."

"I'm sure they were just teaching you," the man assured him, "and when the time is right you'll remember."

However, Ted wasn't satisfied by their explanations. Inevitably, whenever they got into further discussions about the aliens and their actions, the talk usually turned argumentative. The others were firm in their belief that the ETs were wonderful and benevolent, but Ted had reservations about any sort of beings whose actions were so intrusive.

It was during this time, not long after the neighborhood incident, that Ted received a surprisingly clear communication from a source he couldn't identify. He'd always assumed

that such messages came from the spirit world, but now with an awareness of extraterrestrial involvement he wasn't sure.

In spite of its nebulous source, the message was quite specific, about a book that Ted was directed to write. In past readings that other psychics had done for him, he had repeatedly been told that he would be involved with the production of a book. Some of the readings, all the way back to the 1970s, indicated there would be more than one book. But Ted had never felt the urge to write a book, at least not until this new message.

Now the idea caught his fancy. He felt a compulsion to write about his life and experiences, but being no writer, he was frustrated and uncertain of how to begin. So, as he'd done in the past, Ted put the whole thing in the hands of his spirit guides. He told them that if they really wanted him to write, they would have to provide him with the proper equipment and inspiration.

"I don't even have a typewriter," he told them. "If I'm going to do this book, then I want a word processor."

He let the thought go with that, but later, when a friend of his died and bequeathed Ted a word processor, that challenge to the spirits came back to him. A vivid dream soon followed, in which some unidentifiable entities showed Ted the very book he was supposed to write. The next morning, he told a friend about the dream, convinced that it was important.

"They're serious," he said, "they really must want me to do this book. Not only did they show it to me, they even told me what to call it–*THE LIGHT WORKER.*"

But even though the spirits were insisting and the equipment had been provided, Ted delayed starting on the book. His doubts about the nature of these entities tempered his enthusiasm for the project. Instead of writing, Ted put his energy into the psychic readings at the bookstore, yet he continued to think about UFOs and aliens and to discuss them with his friends.

One afternoon, when they had just had one of these conversations at the bookstore, Ted began rummaging through the books alone. A few moments later he glanced up and

noticed a woman, small and mature but very attractive and well-mannered, watching him with a smile.

"I was just browsing," she told him, "and I overheard your conversation."

"Oh?" he replied. "Pretty interesting stuff, isn't it?"

"I really feel that you should read this," she continued, handing him a book.

Ted took it and glanced down at the cover. It showed a drawing of a strange being with large, black eyes, and Ted cringed. It wasn't that he felt the being was familiar, but still it sent a chill through his body. The title was *COMMUNION*.

He looked up to ask the woman about the book, but she was gone. Quickly he searched the bookstore without finding her, so Ted went over to his friends in the back of the room.

"Who was that woman?" he asked.

"We don't know," Beverly replied. "We saw what she did, though. I thought it was someone you knew. I don't think I've ever seen her in here before."

"I've been meaning to tell you to read that book, too," Felicia remarked. "Since you're having ET visitations, you ought to read this. It should help you a lot. Take it home, and when you finish it, there's another one you've got to read, too–*TRANSFORMATION*."

"Okay," Ted agreed, taking the book with him when he left. Reading *COMMUNION* triggered some strong emotions in him, and by the time he finished the book he was pretty well convinced that some of his experiences were indeed alien visits. He read *TRANSFORMATION* as well, and after that Ted opened up and told his bookstore friends about several other of his unusual past events.

"See," his friends responded, "we told you all along that they were alien visitations! You're so lucky, Ted, to have been chosen by them."

Ted didn't feel very lucky, but he tried to accept what his friends said. If most other people did not have such experiences, maybe he was indeed "chosen," although he saw no reason for it. Still, he gave up arguing with his friends about the benevolent nature of the aliens' actions and motives. It would require more knowledge and more experiences, he

reasoned, for him to form any opinion of his own.

And occasionally such new events did occur. Once, late in 1989, for instance, when Ted and Bud were driving home from a trip to Florida, they both witnessed UFO activity. It was around three in the morning, as they approached the area near Crystal Springs, Mississippi, traveling along the small, winding roads and trying to stay awake and alert. Bud took the wheel, and Ted climbed into the back seat to take a nap and refresh himself for the next stint of the journey.

As soon as he lay back and closed his eyes, Ted had a psychic flash, a vision of several deer standing by the side of the road.

"Bud, I think you better slow down," he said, raising up again to peer out the front windshield. "With all these trees, it's hard to see the roadside, and I just had a psychic glimpse of some deer ahead. If we come on them too fast, they might dart in front of the car and cause us to have a wreck."

Bud slowed down accordingly, and about three miles further they saw three deer very near the road, refusing to move away. The car went by them slowly, and as he watched the animals, Bud remarked, "I wish I could do things like that. It never ceases to amaze me how you can do such things."

"I don't know how I do it," Ted replied. "It just seems to happen."

"Things like that prove your psychic ability to me," Bud told him. "I don't have any doubt about that. But I still have a problem with the UFO stuff. It isn't that I doubt what you've told me, but I've never seen anything myself. And the stuff you see on TV isn't very convincing. Besides," he continued, "the government says it's all bullshit, it's not real. I just don't know what to believe. Hell, I wish I could have some kind of physical proof and know it for myself."

"I wish I could give you some," Ted laughed, "but I don't know of any. I have no control when they come and go, and I don't even know what it is they do."

He lay back for a nap, but a few minutes later Bud called out, "Ted! Take a look at that!"

Ted sat up again and looked out the window. Descending through the sky straight in front of them was what appeared

to be a bright shooting star.

"Pretty damn brilliant," Ted said, "and really clear. But, you know, that shooting star seems to be going slower than the ones I've seen before."

A few minutes later, a second shooting star suddenly shot up from behind the car, flying over and directly in front of them, completely silent.

"That's odd," Ted said, "for that star to follow the same path as the first one, don't you think?"

Then a third star shot overhead maybe three minutes later as Ted and Bud watched in amazement. But they hardly had time to comment on it when a fourth one appeared, flying slowly in the same direction as the others.

"Enough, that's enough!" Bud insisted. "I don't want any more proof! That's all the proof I need. I believe you, Ted, I believe you!"

And that was the end of the shooting stars after that.

A much more dramatic event occurred in the following spring, in April 1990, when Ted was visited by Marie Jackson, the woman who had first brought him into the spiritualist association and who had trained him in his psychic development. Although he was no longer actively involved with the association, he and Marie remained very close friends over the years. But since they lived so far apart, visits were rare, and their first few days together were filled with long talks as they caught up on each other's activities.

A few nights later, well after midnight, Ted was startled from sleep by Marie calling his name from the living room where she slept on a sofa-bed.

"Ted!" she shouted, "get in here! Right now!"

She sounded anxious, so Ted roused up and hurried into the living room. Every light in the front of the house was blazing, and there was Marie pacing nervously, puffing on a cigarette and looking very worried.

"My God, Marie, what on earth happened?" Ted asked.

"I don't know," she replied, shaking her head, "but it's really got me going. This was just too weird."

Ted tried to coax her into sitting down, but she was too agitated.

"I was reading in bed," Marie told him, still pacing, "and I don't feel like I drifted off to sleep. I raised up in the bed and looked around, and suddenly all the walls in the trailer just, just disappeared!"

"Huh?" Ted said in astonishment.

"Listen," Marie went on, "I could see outside. I could see from one end of the trailer to the other, and I could see all the way down into your bedroom. The walls were just gone! I saw you in bed, on the left side facing the wall."

"But how could that happen?" Ted asked, bewildered.

"I don't know," Marie shrugged, "and that's not all. When I looked back around, I saw two of the strangest spirits I've ever seen in my life! They came right through where the wall should be, and they walked up and started trying to take me outside."

"Are you all right now?" Ted asked.

"Yeah," she nodded. "They tried to get me outside, but I really threw a fit then. I'm too stubborn, I wasn't about to go anywhere with them, and I gave them hell. By the time I got through with them, they turned me right back around."

"What did they look like?" Ted wanted to know, and as he listened to Marie's description of the small grayish beings, his heart sank. They sounded just like the little creatures who had taken him and his neighbors to the large UFO in the field.

"They must have been some of your ET friends," Marie finished, lighting another cigarette and glancing around the room nervously, "because they sure weren't any friends of mine, not from this world or any other I've ever known. And I don't want to have anything to do with them."

Four

Beyond plants are animals,
Beyond animals is man,
Beyond man is the universe.
The Big Light,
Let the Big Light in!
Jean Toomer

Even before Marie's frightening encounter at his home, Ted felt that the aliens' interest in him was growing stronger. The display of 'shooting stars' that had confirmed for Bud the reality of UFOs also signaled an upcoming change for Ted. He noticed that after his return from Florida in late 1989, the type of clients coming in for psychic readings was decidedly different. Formerly, most of his clients sought information about personal or mundane subjects. They wanted to know about their love affairs, health problems, or jobs. But many of his new clients had a more serious interest in metaphysical rather than personal questions.

And, although he didn't know what to make of it, Ted also found that in quite a few readings he was beginning to turn up evidence of alien contacts. Such things simply hadn't happened in his psychic work before. Now, however, when Ted sat down to read for a client, several times he received unusual images and sensations about the person. And when he described these feelings, more often than not the person confirmed that some strange situation had indeed occurred which matched Ted's information–and pointed to involvement with UFOs and alien beings.

So many of these cases surfaced, in fact, that someone finally suggested forming a group to meet for UFO-related

discussions. Ted and some of his clients soon began gathering on a monthly basis. In the meetings they shared information from books and also from their own unusual experiences. As he got to know these people better, Ted found that some of them had been suffering from many of the same problems he had. Like him, several people in the study group had recurrent sleep disorders, and some of them had also been through the anxiety and mental turmoil so familiar to Ted from his own past.

The group continued on through the next year, evolving a strong sense of support among the members. Ted realized that none of them, however, really knew enough to feel certain about the true nature of the aliens, their plans and actions and motivations. But they discussed all the possibilities and shared a variety of opinions. Belief in the benevolence of the ETs still dominated the group, though, which prompted occasional trips out into the countryside at night, where they sat around talking together, waiting and hoping to see a UFO.

Such a sighting never happened, but the group was encouraged by another exciting development that gave them an even greater appreciation of Ted and his special abilities. In their lively discussions, one or another of the members often posed questions for general consideration. No one, including Ted, really expected a solid answer to be forthcoming.

But then he began to have nighttime contacts again, and this time the information he received was clearly related to the questions raised in the study group. The contacts always came while he slept, and upon waking the next morning Ted could remember only the message, not the messenger.

Each time he received new information in this way, Ted shared it with the group, fueling new discussions and new questions. His friends gave serious consideration to the insights communicated by what they felt sure were Ted's friendly ETs. But Ted himself, after years of accepting spirit communications as commonplace, was more puzzled than dazzled by these new contacts.

He was especially bothered by the nebulous nature of his

so-called ET visitors. Some of his study-group friends talked about various 'homes' from which the aliens supposedly originated, such as Zeta Reticuli, Orion, and the Pleiades, certain that the ETs were physical entities. If the aliens truly were real, as humans are, Ted wondered why they hid their physical nature from him, communicating only through telepathy or dreamlike, dimly remembered encounters. Until he had more objective confirmation of the reality of UFOs, Ted decided, he couldn't be sure just who was communicating with him.

Such was his state of mind one evening as he sat watching Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind.* He'd seen it before, but this time Ted's attention was caught by a scene in which a small round light was shown flying in and around a UFO. Orange and red, with quick movements, it behaved as if it were somehow controlled by an invisible umbilical cord.

"I wonder what that was all about," he mused, mildly curious, but a few nights later, when part of that movie scene was reenacted right in his own house, his curiosity turned to amazement.

After retiring for the night, Ted awoke from sleep with a sudden start, his heart racing. He looked around the dimly lit room, thinking more uninvited guests were about to arrive. He felt his panic surge as a round sphere slowly floated toward him from across the room near the ceiling. He'd seen it just as it made its entrance through the bedroom wall. About the size of a basketball, it shimmered with a red and orange glow. Ted thought that it would probably look like a ball of fire if it were seen moving rapidly in total darkness.

Ted closed his eyes for a few seconds, hoping that perhaps he was hallucinating or holding an image from a very vivid dream still in his mind. But when he opened his eyes, the ball of light was still there, only now it had moved much nearer. In fact, it was now directly over him, forcing him to look straight up to see it. The light was within arm's reach, and in spite of his almost paralyzing fear, Ted slowly lifted his hands to touch the floating sphere.

To his amazement, a voice commanded him to stop. The voice was somewhat mechanical, and it sounded as if it came

from every direction at once. Ted turned to look down the hallway to see if someone had spoken to him from that direction, but it was empty. He thought of jumping from the bed and making a dash down the hallway as he glanced in that direction, but almost as if the ball of light heard his silent thoughts, it spoke again.

"Do not fear," it said. "I have come only to deliver a message."

Ted lay silent on his bed looking up at this strange device hovering three feet from his face. He could discern large grooves crossing the sphere in several directions. Inside these grooves, spaced a few inches apart, were nickel-sized 'lenses' that made turns to focus in all directions within the bedroom, as well as at Ted's face.

At that moment there was a tremendous inflow of information into Ted's brain. It felt as if someone had pushed the "enter" button on a computer to store pages of information. It literally was that quick and sudden, but Ted was unable to recognize the data at that moment. As he was analyzing what had just happened, the device drifted toward the bedroom door and made its way down the hall.

Ted silently crept out of bed and began to follow it. As he and the light made their way into the living room, it picked up speed quickly and made some ninety-degree turns, demonstrating its independence of his physical and mental control. Then it accelerated rapidly toward the kitchen wall and vanished right through it.

Still in his underwear, Ted ran outside onto the patio and into the yard trying to follow the ball of light. But there was no trace of it in sight.

Ted looked at the clock when he went back inside. It was 3:47 a.m. The entire event had happened in only three to five minutes, Ted knew, but it seemed like a lifetime. With jangled nerves, extreme curiosity, and quite a bit of fear, he sat up the rest of the night. By dawn he was ready for the sleep that he knew he could now get with the rising sun, his old familiar security blanket from many sleepless nights in the past.

He awoke at 11:20 a.m.and took a quick shower. Feeling

quite refreshed, he went into the kitchen to make coffee, and glancing up at the kitchen wall, he suddenly was flooded with memories of the entire event the previous night. As he sat sipping hot coffee, he realized that he not only remembered the event this time, but he could also remember the message, and the messenger.

Information which the machine had somehow put into his mind explained that it was a device controlled from a nearby UFO, as humans call them, but the occupants referred to them as their life-support vehicle. These ball-shaped, lighted objects are scanners, he was informed, used to inspect a dwelling before their couriers are sent inside for their mission.

The scanner with its numerous lenses and listening devices allows the controller in the craft to view the entire layout of the dwelling. The controller is able to see where every person is located, how many are in each room, and if they are asleep or awake. Are they dressed or armed in any way? Are there any animals around? Will the contactee need to be manipulated to another room so as not to disturb the others? The object is to complete the mission with as little resistance as possible.

As Ted sat there with his coffee, for the first time since all the UFO business had entered his awareness, he felt really violated, intruded upon, and helpless to stop this invasion of his privacy. He decided to call all of his study group members and share this experience with them, hoping someone would have a suggestion as to how he could stop this outrageous intrusion.

By five p.m. Ted has spoken to five individuals about the nighttime visitation. He detailed the whole event objectively to each one, careful not to overreact or exaggerate the occurrence. Each conversation was openly received until Ted began to bring into focus the negative ramifications, such as invasion of privacy, being spied upon, feelings of helplessness to control the visits, possible danger of radiation, and just plain agitation at the arrogant attitude that it was all right for the ETs to enter at their convenience, not Ted's, with no invitation whatsoever.

After he finished speaking to his friends, Ted was totally frustrated. All of them immediately turned the situation around to show Ted just how privileged he was to be taught this valuable information. No matter what he suggested, his friends countered with some justification that made it all acceptable. They told him he was being ridiculous to even consider that the alien device wasn't one hundred percent benevolent in its nature and intent.

One person came over to inspect the wall where the ball of light entered and exited Ted's house, searching for any evidence of penetration. Another insisted that Ted should try to direct the UFO controllers to *his* home because he would not show them the lack of respect and consideration which he felt Ted obviously had for the situation. Ted wondered if he was being just plain negative, as his friends accused him, or if they might be walking around with some metaphysical blinders on their eyes.

"Oh, well," Ted reminded himself, "I haven't been injured, just frightened a bit, so maybe something good will come out of all this yet. But one thing I do know. I'm going to play the game like my friends are, that it's all for the good, until I know otherwise, because I'm tired of getting attacked every time I even suggest that there are elements to this that I don't like."

Through the people to which Ted told his story, word got around the Shreveport UFO community about the ball of light. Within ten days, he received three intriguing phone calls from local people who chose to remain anonymous.

One man, who worked for a utility company, told Ted that he, too, had had a strange experience only a few weeks before, with a marble-sized ball of white and yellow light that made a slight buzzing noise. He noticed it hovering over his head while he was up a utility pole at work. It slowly traversed his entire body, softly humming and making almost undetectable clicking noises. The man said he never saw where it came from, but that when he came down the pole, what had seemed like a ten-minute event had actually taken over an hour.

He, too, felt that something had crammed his brain with

information that went in too quickly for him to decipher. The thing that disturbed him most, he said, was that in spite of everything he tried to do, he couldn't get the strange device to go away, and that it finally entered his chest, not to be seen again. He wasn't able to tell anyone about this until talking with Ted, and he wanted Ted to reassure him that it was all right and that he wasn't in any danger.

Ted could only share experiences with the man and comfort him with the fact that if anything were really wrong, it probably would have shown up by now. Other than losing a little sleep the first few nights, the man seemed to be okay. Ted talked to him a few weeks later, and the man stressed that nothing else had occurred, and that he felt better after discussing the experience with Ted.

Another caller, a woman, told him about a night three years earlier, in which she and a friend observed a similar device floating around her large, open porch during the wee hours of the morning. The two friends had been out to a local club that evening and arrived back home around 1:30 a.m. They both got ready for bed but then decided to sit on the porch for a while, enjoying the cool summer night, to have one more cigarette before retiring.

As they sat there, an object that looked like a ball of fire darted across the lawn and made a right-angle turn toward them on the porch. It hovered silently in front of them for about ten seconds and then sped away. The women were frightened and locked themselves in the house for the rest of the night. They shared their story with one other friend, who laughed and suggested they stay out of the bars, and that maybe someone had slipped them some LSD in their drinks.

The women insisted that wasn't true, but they realized this was not an experience that just anyone would care to hear. So they vowed not to bring it up again. One of the women told Ted that she was relieved to find someone else who could relate to her experience. As she wished Ted well, she told him that she prayed every night that she would never see the device again because it left her with an uncomfortable and uncanny feeling. Her friend rarely spoke about it. The women had no recollection of any missing time, just

jangled nerves.

A nineteen-year-old man from a nearby community also phoned. He insisted that such a ball of light met him one night on the way home from a date. He said it was shortly after midnight when he came face to face with the light after his pickup suddenly stalled on a dark country road. The man got out of the truck to raise the hood, trying to determine why the vehicle died, when to his surprise a glowing, basketball-sized object, just as Ted had seen, suddenly came out of nowhere and hovered within arm's reach.

He said he felt and heard nothing. The ball of light seemed to float near him only a few seconds and then disappeared as if it blinked away. He jumped back into the pickup to grab a flashlight, but he found that the truck was now working again. He drove at a high speed the rest of the two-mile trip home. He had no recall of missing time and claimed he had never seen a UFO but would like to see one, having become extremely interested in the subject since the encounter with the ball of light.

Thinking about his own encounter with the monitoring sphere, Ted realized just how much the strange event had echoed the movie scene in *Close Encounters*, and he wondered if someone or something had been listening when he had made the remark about it to himself while watching the film. He also realized that if he had witnessed the light display at any time before 1988, he probably would have accepted it as a signal or a manifestation of some spiritual entity.

But now Ted realized that the encounter, imitating the movie scene, was meant to direct his attention to a UFO-based explanation for many of his previous experiences. Was this event, he wondered, meant to give the objective confirmation he'd been asking for? Maybe so, he mused, but that ball of light, in spite of its very real but brief appearance, was still not enough to convince Ted.

Five

God answers sharp and sudden on some prayers,
And thrusts the thing we have prayed for in our face
Browning

Shortly after this episode, Marie Jackson phoned and invited Ted for a visit at her home in Florida. Eager to discuss his recent experiences with his old mentor, Ted accepted. He left in July, and as the plane carried him toward Florida he spent his time gazing out the window, wondering if a UFO would flit by, and reading a book on the subject.

"I wonder if the ETs know I'm going to Marie's," he mused silently. "They seem to know a lot about me, so I guess it's possible."

When he arrived, he found that another old friend, Amelia Reynolds, was also staying at Marie's, and the three of them shared wonderful conversations, laughing and talking late into the evenings. Ted told them all about the UFO study group and the many strange experiences he and the others had witnessed. Marie listened with great curiosity, but Amelia dismissed the whole phenomenon out of hand.

No matter what Ted told her, she emphatically declared, "There is no such thing as UFOs. That's the sort of stuff the *National Enquirer* prints, so how on earth can you take it seriously?"

Just after midnight one evening, the three friends said good night and went off to prepare for bed. Ted's room was at the far end of the house from the bedroom where Marie and Amelia occupied twin beds. The lights were out and the house was quiet, until Amelia suddenly awoke hearing a helicopter hovering noisily overhead.

"Marie?" she whispered, "Do you hear that? What's a helicopter doing flying so low around here at this time of night?"

"What helicopter?" Marie replied. "I don't hear anything. You must have been dreaming."

"No, I'm not! It's right over us! I can hear it right now," Amelia insisted. "What's the matter with you?"

And then she froze, silent, staring up at the ceiling in astonishment. "I can see it," she said slowly. "Marie, I can see it."

Marie looked up at the dark ceiling in disbelief. "Wake up, Amelia, you're dreaming," she said. "There's nothing there."

"I'm not asleep," Amelia protested, raising her head from the pillow. Her eyes still gazed upwards. "I swear to you, I can see a helicopter right up there! By that big tree with all the leaves. I see the front of the thing, it's rounded, and the legs are folded underneath."

"Well, why can't I see it, then?" Marie asked, exasperated.

"I don't know," Amelia replied. "It's like the ceiling isn't there. It has disappeared, and I can see right through the roof."

A faint bluish glow suddenly appeared around Amelia as she tried to rise from the bed, and Marie jumped up with a start.

"Oh, my God," she said as the glow increased, surrounding the bed in a circular haze of blue light. "Amelia! Get out of there!"

"I can't move," Amelia said helplessly. "I'm paralyzed! Where are you? I can't see you any more! There's something's down there, by the foot of the bed."

"I tell you, I don't see anything," Marie insisted, looking around the room. "What is it that you're seeing?"

"Two people, two beings," Amelia answered, staring at the end of her bed, "and they don't look like spirits."

"What do they look like?" Marie asked.

"One of them is real tall," Amelia described, "and he's got greenish skin, like a lizard or alligator. I never saw such a thing before! Its head is egg-shaped, and I can see slanted

eyes, but no ears or mouth. And this other one is shorter, sort of blue-black colored, like a grape or raisin. What are they, Marie? Can you communicate with them? What kind of spirits are they?"

"Whoa," Marie interrupted. "I don't know anything about these beings. They sound like some of Ted's friends, they're not mine. Ted!" she shouted, growing more frightened. "Ted! Get in here! There's something wrong with Amelia!"

Ted was awakened by the uproar, but he couldn't understand what Marie was shouting. He padded out the door and started down the hall, stopping momentarily when he saw a blue glow emanating from the open doorway.

Inside, Marie had circled around the room and was waiting for him, pressed back against the farthest wall from where Amelia lay motionless, enveloped in the brilliant light. Ted stepped in uncertainly and then stopped dead in his tracks, staring.

"What the...?" he started to say, but then darting sparks of light suddenly shot through the blue haze, making both Ted and Marie jump in surprise.

"Amelia!" he yelled, "get out of there!"

"Marie?" Amelia called out, "Marie? Where are you?"

"I'm right here," she shouted back, "and Ted's here, too."

They inched closer to the bed, still keeping a healthy distance from the blue glow, which was now filled with tiny, rapid explosions of lightning trails.

"I can hardly hear you," Amelia said loudly. "Speak up!"

"What's going on?" Ted asked. "Where did this all come from?"

"I don't know," Marie said. "She started talking about a helicopter, and now she says she can see it up through the roof, that it's right overhead. What should we do?"

"Are you all right, Amelia?" Ted shouted. "Is that stuff hurting you, all that lightning?"

"What lightning?" Amelia shouted back in surprise. "I'm okay, but I can't move. That helicopter thing is still up there, and those two other things are still just standing there staring at me."

"What's she talking about?" Ted asked, and Marie told

him about the strange creatures Amelia had described.

"I can't see them," Ted called out to Amelia. "Ask them for a name if you can."

The alligator man sounded suspiciously familiar to him, as he thought about a strange series of events he'd endured many years before.

"Could it be something like Volmo?" he whispered to Marie, but she shrugged uncertainly.

"I don't hear them talking," Amelia replied. "But it's like they're putting a message into my mind. I see big capital letters spelling out a name: RAYMOND."

"What are they doing now?" Marie asked. "Are you still okay?"

"Yes," Amelia said, "and now I'm seeing another word. I think it's the name of that helicopter thing. It says COMMAND II."

"We've got to help her," Marie insisted. "This doesn't feel right."

"I don't know," Ted hesitated. "She's not in any pain, at least. We don't know what might happen if we try to pull her out of that energy field or whatever it is. Maybe we should wait."

"Are those beings still there?" Marie asked, but before Amelia could answer, the blue light flashed off, and Amelia fell back against the pillow.

Marie ran to the bed, and Ted turned on the overhead light, looking around apprehensively. But everything seemed perfectly normal.

"I never saw anything like those beings," Amelia said, clearly shaken. "They didn't look like spirits, I tell you that! And that helicopter wasn't normal, either. When you were talking about UFOs and aliens the other day, Ted, I didn't believe you. But after this, I don't know. That's the weirdest thing I've ever been through."

As they sat up together, trying to calm one another down and discussing the bizarre events, Marie and Ted were surprised to learn that Amelia had not seen the bluish sphere of light around her bed. And then Marie thought about her own odd encounter with unfamiliar beings.

"When I was at Ted's last year," she told Amelia, "I think I had a little visit from those guys, too. You remember, Ted?"

"Yeah," he nodded, "how could I forget? You woke me up screaming and kept me up all night, holding your hand and smoking cigarettes."

"Well, you'd have been upset, too," she replied, "if you'd seen what I did." And she described the whole event, how the walls disappeared and the two strange beings tried to take her outside.

"That all happened while I was with Ted," she finished, "and now look what's happened to you, Amelia, with Ted here with us. No, those aren't any spirits that I know of. I think they showed up because of Ted."

He didn't argue with her. Like him, both Amelia and Marie had seen the walls or ceiling dissolve and vanish, and they had encountered non-human creatures in unknown craft. Spirits, they all knew, needed neither space ships nor 'helicopters' for their travels, but these mysterious beings apparently did.

When he returned to Shreveport and told his friends about this latest experience, they were more convinced than ever that Ted was the focus of extraterrestrial interest. Alien activity around Ted was clearly increasing, everyone realized. Yet in spite of these events, and in spite of all their reading and discussion, no one could truly explain what was going on, or why.

The more Ted thought about the situation, the more he felt that he needed help. It frightened him that he had no control over his relationship with the aliens. Marie's visitors had come unbidden in 1990 at his home, and certainly he and the neighbors hadn't been asked if they wanted to go for a UFO ride in 1989. Now there was the blue light sphere and Amelia talking to invisible aliens. It was just too much to ignore. He wanted some real answers, and so far the study group had not provided them.

Then he remembered what the spirits had taught him, about manifesting the things he needed, and he began visualizing someone who could bring him help. He decided to place an announcement in a local metaphysical newsletter,

Illuminations. In bold print, the notice simply said:

TED RICE WOULD LIKE TO START A UFO ABDUCTION SUPPORT GROUP. PLEASE INDICATE YOUR INTEREST TO P. O. BOX _____ AND WE WILL FORWARD TO TED.

It was his way of putting his problem in the hands of a greater force, as he'd done many times in the past. He had no idea what results the announcement might bring, but he knew what he and his friends had hoped for: a knowledgeable UFO researcher and a competent hypnotist who could help them investigate their experiences. It was time for some answers.

But even Ted didn't expect that a reply would come so soon. A month after the notice was printed, Ted received a letter from Dr. Karla Turner, an abduction researcher in Little Rock, responding to his announcement. As he read through the letter, his excitement grew. Dr. Turner told him that not only had she been working with another researcher whose abduction reports numbered well into the hundreds, but that she herself was an abductee. And she recommended that he contact the other researcher, Barbara Bartholic, if he should decide to use regressive hypnosis as an investigative tool.

The letter felt like an answer to his prayer. He didn't know exactly what was involved in an abduction investigation, but he was determined to find out. Ted wrote back to Dr. Turner right away, asking her to phone, and once that contact was made, they talked frequently. Karla explained how she had come to work with Barbara a few years earlier when her own family had gone through repeated encounters with aliens. And she had just written a book, *INTO THE FRINGE*, that told of her family's experiences. She also let him know that there were thousands of other people going through the same sort of thing, and this reassured Ted that he wasn't merely suffering from a mental disturbance.

But other than these things, Karla didn't give Ted any new information. Instead, she concentrated on learning all about Ted's past experiences as well as about his personal and family background. He told her of his childhood in the cottonfield country of northwest Alabama, where he was

born in 1942 and where he learned to love nature and its wilder creatures. He told her about his career in business finance and also about his psychic work.

She listened intently as Ted explained his metaphysical philosophy, which taught him that all life forms evolve upward spiritually, toward perfection and the ultimate source of all genesis. People who come into this world destined to work and contribute to human transcendence are known as "Light Workers," a term commonly used for spiritual teachers and leaders in the metaphysical community. And he shared his sense of mission, that his psychic gift should be used to help others understand their own destinies and to show them how the powers of love and light were at work in their lives. Through these long conversations, Karla came to know Ted as a warm, accessible, insightful man, with the sense of humor of a natural comedian.

When Ted went on to describe some of the bizarre events in his life, Karla recognized details that indicated ongoing alien encounters. She put him in touch with Barbara Bartholic, and soon they made plans to meet in person. Ted was eager to learn about the strange beings whose involvement in his life he could no longer deny, and he hoped that regressive hypnosis would help uncover any hidden knowledge.

But before Barbara consented to work with Ted, she needed to know as much about him as possible. Over weeks of long phone conversations, she listened as Ted unfolded a most amazing account. From everything she had learned investigating other abduction cases, it soon became clear to Barbara that Ted Rice had indeed been chosen for a life-long involvement with forces that most people never knew existed.

His recent encounters with UFOs and aliens, she soon learned, were just another twist in the path he had traveled. He had known spirits and spaceships, angels and ghosts, a beautiful female ET and a bizarre reptilian humanoid, and he had been shown scenes of heaven and of horrible destruction. In order to make any sense of these events, his entire life's journey had to be examined. And the story that emerged, of

the mysterious forces that shaped the life of a cotton-patch kid from backwoods Alabama and transformed him into a "Light Worker," had great implications beyond the merely personal. With all that it revealed about illusion and reality, good and evil, and the nature of humanity, Ted Rice's story challenges everything we think we know about the universe.

Part Two

The Child

A youth to whom was given
So much of earth–so much of heaven
Wordsworth

There is always one moment in childhood
when the door opens and lets the future in.
Graham Greene

Six

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
James 4:7

Unseen forces first intruded into Ted's life when he was very young, no more than four or five, and the events of that intrusion resulted in a scolding and a spanking. This, and the high strangeness of the whole affair, made it something he never forgot.

Shortly after dawn one morning, young Teddy awoke to find himself floating out of the bed. He was surprised but unafraid, even though, as his point of view ascended, he glanced down and saw his body still asleep with his head sticking out of the covers. The next thing he knew, Teddy was in the kitchen, apparently hovering near the ceiling, as a busy scene unfolded below him in the room. His mother and grandmother were there, talking with his aunt, uncle, and young cousin Sally who had stopped by unexpectedly. Teddy was so amazed by the situation that all he could do was watch and listen.

"What are y'all doing out here so early?" his mother asked. "You must be on your way somewhere."

"Yes," his aunt said, "we decided last night to ride over to Parrish today, to see my brother and his family before they leave to go back to Mobile. They've been up there with Daddy for a few days. So we thought we'd stop and pick up Teddy, if you'll let him come. Sally and him, they always have a good time together. They keep each other occupied and out of our hair," she laughed.

Up above them, Teddy grew excited, eager to go off with

his cousin. Sally was one of his favorite playmates, and any adventure that broke the pleasant monotony of farm life was a treat.

"No," his mother said, and Teddy couldn't believe his ears, "no, he better not go this time. His daddy is coming in today, and we're supposed to take Teddy to get a haircut and some new shoes. He's got holes in those things he's wearing. So I think we better pass this time."

Teddy was heartbroken and angry. "What do you mean?" he shouted. "Why can't I go?"

But no matter how loudly he protested, his mother and everyone else in the room ignored him. Finally he realized that they didn't even know he was there. They couldn't see him or hear him, and his young mind was bewildered. No matter how hard he tried to interrupt them, they kept talking about the relatives and other trivial matters, and then his uncle's family prepared to leave.

"How about y'all going out the back door, around that side of the house?" his mother suggested. "If Teddy hears you leave out the front door, he'll surely wake up. He'll throw a fit to go with you, and I'll end up having to spank his bottom to make him stop showing out."

They all laughed, and she followed the others out the back door, leaving Teddy sputtering indignantly–and invisibly. He was angry that he couldn't go, angry that they'd laughed about him getting a spanking, and most of all angry at being ignored.

Suddenly, Teddy popped up from his bed and looked around in puzzlement. Apparently he was back in his body, but he didn't pause to think about it. Still bristling with indignation, he jumped out of bed and stormed down the long hallway into the kitchen. His mother and grandmother were there alone, cleaning the breakfast table.

"Why didn't you let me go?" he shouted angrily. "I wanted to go with Sally! I wanted to go on the trip!"

The two women stared at him and then at each other.

"What on earth are you talking about?" his mother asked.

"They was just here! I saw 'em!" Teddy said, still shouting, as he wiped away tears of frustration.

"No, you didn't," she argued. "That was over an hour ago, and I checked your room right after they left. You were asleep."

"Huh-uh, I was in here," he insisted. "You were mean! You wouldn't answer me when I talked to you, Mama. I saw my uncle and aunt and Sally right here. They said could I go with them, and you said no! But I wanted to go, I wanna go right now!"

Teddy's mother picked him up and gave him a couple of swats on the backside. "You stop that temper fit right now," she commanded and sent him back to his room.

He calmed down for the moment, but later when he repeated his story about being in the kitchen and seeing the relatives, he was angry and bewildered when no one believed him. And when she managed to get him alone for a moment, his grandmother cautioned him to stop talking about such things.

"They're going to think you're mighty strange and peculiar, Teddy," she said. "Things like that just don't happen. And if they did, they'd be bad things. You're too young to know about King Saul and the witch of Endor, but it's right there in the Bible. You've got to stay away from such dark things, child."

She hugged him tightly. "Grandy loves you, Teddy," she whispered. "You're my good little boy, my little dear one, and I'll always take care of you. But you've got to watch out, all your life. There's a lot of good in this world, and there's a whole lot of bad, too."

He let his grandmother comfort him. He hadn't understood why she was so concerned, any more than he had understood what had happened to him. But if Grandy said it was wrong, then it must be so, he thought. And when no one mentioned it again, the incident was soon forgotten.

Years later, in 1975, it all came back to him, though. Ted was living in Atlanta then, actively involved with the King's Gate Spiritualist Church. He was a full-time bank employee, but he devoted several evenings a week to the study and practice of his psychic work. He did private readings and occasional public presentations, fascinating the audience as

he picked out person after person to scan and discuss. He saw scenes of their past and visions of their future that later quite often proved to be correct.

It was during this time that a couple of very odd incidents occurred. One night Ted woke up, and, moving as if in a dream, he went to the typewriter, inserted blank paper, and began to click at the keys. A story was clear and full in his mind, a story of a little boy–"Karly Kane," a voice told Ted–chasing a rabbit in a field.

It began with Karly walking home for lunch, with a small rabbit in his arms, when he was overcome by fatigue and went into the shade of a tree. His awareness changed suddenly, expanding, and then he found himself in a different place, slipping into unconsciousness. When he awoke, he heard beautiful music. A voice from an unseen source guided him through a misty wonderland of wild creatures, and nearby a group of small children sang. The music made Karly think of heaven. There were about thirty children dressed in blue, and he reached out to touch one of them.

"No," the voice said, "you cannot be with them at this time."

Karly grew angry, screaming and kicking against the voice and the force that restrained him. And suddenly everything changed. The children were gone, the shade tree was gone, even his rabbit was gone, and Karly was alone in the sun, longing for home.

Ted finished the story and went right back to bed. It was only the next morning, when found the neatly typed pages on his desk, that he recalled getting up sometime during the night and writing it, although he had no idea what had motivated him or how he had managed to do it at that hour.

The second time this happened, Ted had even less memory of the event. He woke one morning and found another neatly typed piece of writing, several pages in length, lying beside his typewriter. He lived alone, so there was no one else who could have typed them, but the words he read were completely unfamiliar. He had a vague, hazy memory of getting up during the night, but he couldn't remember doing anything else, especially typing. Still, he must have been the

author, and that made the story on the pages all the more puzzling.

It was about Margaret Mitchell, the author of *GONE WITH THE WIND*, but Ted had no great interest in Margaret Mitchell. The story told of Miss Mitchell's creation of her masterpiece, a task which had been accomplished with the aid of some spirit form or guide. Working through Miss Mitchell, this spirit entity had shaped a grand book that brought the romantic southern tradition to life. As the story in his hands explained,

"The spirit was a highly evolved soul that had once lived a life similar to Scarlett O'Hara's, and her tale was as strong as the Ancient Mariner's and she had to tell it. She needed a release for this energy and Margaret was her channel. Through Margaret's pen she would be able to confess her unjust deeds that had hurt so many when she was on the earth plane. It would help Margaret in her own spiritual development as well, and entertainment would be brought to countless millions. Quietly and secretively she moved in around Margaret and they formed a team that produced one of the greatest novels of all times."

This was not the sort of message, or the medium, he was familiar with from his spirit guides. The meaning in the story wasn't clear to him, but he was even more concerned that he had no memory at all of writing it.

At least the first story, he realized, might have a partial explanation, for it was clear that Karly's own description, actions, and background were copied from his own. He wondered if the story came from some unforgotten childhood memory, so Ted searched through his past but came up empty. He simply didn't remember such a thing happening to him at eight years old, which was Karly's age in the story.

Thinking back to those years in Alabama did bring to mind the memory of that morning he left his body in bed and floated into the kitchen, though. He loved his childhood and the people who cared for him, especially his Grandy. Wistfully he thought about her, and an old, haunting emotion started up in him. Her death, when he was ten years old, had

cut deeply into his heart. Although there was no reason for it, Ted had always suffered a sense of guilt and uncertainty about it.

If only things hadn't been so strange just before she died, perhaps he would have felt differently. His family had moved away from the farm by then and into a small town, so he didn't get to visit Grandy very often. Sometimes she would come for a visit and stay two or three weeks, filling the house with the delicious smells of cobblers, cookies, and cakes. Their house was small, and when Grandy visited, she shared his little bedroom, snuggling up warmly at night and lulling him to sleep with stories of the old times.

Every detail of her last visit was still clear in Ted's mind. Daddy had brought her to town on Thursday night, because it was such a long drive to the farm and back. They hardly had a chance to talk before bed, but Teddy looked forward to the weekend and some of Grandy's wonderful hot biscuits for Sunday breakfast. He put on his pajamas and climbed in between the blankets, and then his grandmother, in a long white gown, slid in beside him. The bed soon filled with her warmth, and Teddy dozed off almost immediately.

It was dark when he opened his eyes. He sensed something in the room, long before he heard it, but when he tried to sit up and look around, his body wouldn't move. He felt wild-eyed terror, like a trapped animal, wishing with all his heart that he could burrow to safety under Grandy beside him.

Something shifted then, and Teddy was suddenly aware of being at the foot of the bed. He saw both their bodies still under the covers, and now he could hear a voice. It was unfamiliar, deep and angry and male, and for a crazy moment he wondered if the voice could possibly be coming from him, since he didn't see anyone else in the room. The words made no sense, however, but Teddy could feel the dangerous anger within them. A shift again, and he was back in his body, in bed and still unable to move. Grandy wasn't moving, either. The man's deep, frightening voice droned on, and Teddy fought to cry out at him to stop. His mouth wouldn't work. He couldn't raise his hand to turn on the bedside lamp, he

couldn't punch his grandmother in the back and wake her up, he couldn't do anything but feel afraid. So he closed his eyes, and the next moment, it seemed, he opened them to see daylight streaming in through the lace-curtained window by the bed.

Grandy was already up and gone. Sleepily, Teddy went into the kitchen and found her sitting at the table alone. She was dressed in the same clothes she'd worn the day before, and her suitcase stood waiting by the back door.

"Where's Mama?" he asked, looking around.

"In the bathroom," she answered. "And your daddy's gone off to work. Think you ought to get ready for school now?"

"Uh-huh," he said, turning to go. But then he stopped and walked back over to his grandmother with a puzzled look on his face. "What was that last night?" he asked.

"What was what?" she replied, avoiding his gaze.

"Didn't you hear it, Grandy?" he asked. "Who was that man? I woke up and heard him talking. I didn't see him, but he scared me. Who was that?"

She reached out and enfolded Teddy into her lap. There were tears in her eyes when she finally answered him, and the young boy began to cry, too.

"That was the Devil, child," she told him. "That was the Devil, but don't you worry about it none. Your grandma took care of him, so don't think about it any more."

She kissed him on both cheeks and then put him back down on the floor.

"Now, go get dressed, and I'm going to fix you a good breakfast. Go on, now," she commanded.

Teddy obeyed, but he was troubled by Grandy's statement. And her tears. If she was frightened enough to cry, he thought, the Devil must surely be a bad, bad man. He was glad that Grandy had promised to protect him.

When he returned from school that day, he found his mother and father and grandmother in the middle of a heated argument.

"That's crazy," his father was saying. "You just got here, for heaven's sake!" He turned to Teddy's mother for support,

but she just shrugged.

"No matter," Grandy replied. "I want to go home, right now."

"I can't just load up and drive you all the way back to the farm, Mama," his father said. "I got things to take care of. Why don't you wait till next weekend?"

Grandy's expression never wavered. "I'm packed, and I want to leave now. I'm sorry to get in your way, but you've got to take me home."

Teddy's father shook his head. "I just can't do it, not tonight," he said. "The best I can do is tomorrow, but this is just crazy."

"Tomorrow, then," Grandy reluctantly agreed. "You drive me home in the morning."

That night in Teddy's bed, she read her Bible out loud to him for a long time. And then she prayed in earnest, rocking the boy back and forth in her arms to the rhythm of the whispered words.

Before breakfast the next day, she was dressed and packed again, waiting impatiently for the family to get ready. When everything was packed and loaded, they set off on the three-hour drive to the old farm. Teddy played happily in the back seat, but he noticed that in the front the grownups were hardly talking. His father looked perplexed, his mother bewildered, and his grandmother simply stared straight ahead without a word to anyone.

When they reached the farm, Teddy tumbled out of the car and ran into the yard, eager to stretch and play after the morning's long drive. His parents helped Grandy take her things inside, and Teddy raced around to the back yard for the tire swing that dangled from a large tree by the fence. The stress of the long trip soon vanished, and he felt exhilarated to be back in the place he loved best. A sudden scream echoed out from the house, and Teddy stopped swinging. There was another scream as he raced indoors, but before he could go very far his mother grabbed him up and hurried him out of the living room. Over her shoulder, he could see his father kneeling on the floor and his beloved Grandy lying there white and still.

Everything went into slow motion. In a daze, he watched as his grandmother slipped away, waiting for an ambulance to arrive. Whatever happened after that was a blurry memory.

It was a long time before Teddy stopped grieving for his grandmother, and he never forgot those strange words she had whispered at the breakfast table.

"It was the Devil."

He couldn't explain the guilt he felt about her death, either. The doctors said Grandy had died from a massive stroke, but Teddy wasn't sure. He'd heard that evil voice, and if Grandy said it was the Devil, then it surely was. So what did the Devil want, then? Grandy told him not to worry, that she and God would protect him, but from what? Was that why his grandmother died, to protect him? Nothing he learned later in his spiritualist training was able to explain that event, so it remained a distant memory kept tender by his haunting, faceless guilt.

Seven

Four angels to my bed,
Four angels round my head,
One to watch, and one to pray,
And two to bear my soul away.
Thomas Ady

For several years after Grandy's death, Ted lived a generally normal, happy life, adapted to his time and place. Small-town Alabama in the 1950s was a narrow world in many ways. Its people professed conservative religious and political beliefs, even if they didn't always practice them, and their expectations in life were modest and provincial. Things seldom changed, and that suited everyone just fine, including Ted. After all, he was popular in school, with plenty of friends, and very involved in extracurricular activities. His high-school years should have sailed along smoothly and predictably.

But Ted wasn't destined for the life of a typical teenager. Someone or something else–whether divine or demented, Ted debated years later–had other plans. In the middle of his fourteenth year, the agents of this unknown force decided to pay him a visit. They came in the night, like thieves, and stole away Ted's tranquility.

He thought they were angels. When he awoke in bed that night, the first thing Ted saw was a soft glow of bluish-green light pervading the room. Then he watched in pure disbelief as two small beings simply appeared through the wall and stood facing him. They looked like immature human forms dressed in flowing robes of blue and green, and their heads were covered by hoods or turbans. Ted tried to see their faces clearly, but it was as if they had no facial features, almost as if

were translucent.

He was transfixed, unable to move, until the two beings came to either side of the bed. Then he found himself floating between them as they maneuvered him right through the wall and out into the dark night. Gliding above the ground, they continued down the street and stopped at the deserted schoolyard half a block away. By this time, Ted was able to look around a bit, and off in the distance he saw two more angels moving toward him, with a young girl between them. It was his neighbor and schoolmate, Jill, and she looked as frozen and bewildered as he did.

The angels positioned the two young people face to face, and one angel stepped between them. It placed its hand over Ted's chest for a moment and then moved it to the space over Jill's heart. A strange voice sounded in Ted's head: "We have merged your souls."

Ted didn't understand what this meant, as if his mind was unable to function, so he just nodded mutely. Suddenly, a brilliant light flared up around them on every side, blinding him. When he opened his eyes again, he was back in his bed, shivering. And for the rest of the night he lay awake thinking about the strange event and the hooded angels. Nothing about the experience made any sense.

Not, that is, until the next day. At school, the moment Ted saw Jill he felt a rush of emotion as strong as a physical jolt. Yesterday he wouldn't have given her a second thought, but today he adored her. Totally, completely, and painfully. The scene with the angels came back to him, and he knew that somehow he and Jill had been marked for each other, destined to be together. Their love was designed and created by a heavenly source, he realized, and surely Jill must know it, too.

But she walked on past him without a word. And although Ted immediately thereafter put all his energy into pursuing her, Jill just didn't seem to care about his burning love. Ted was crushed. He lost interest in outside activities, ignored his schoolwork, and withdrew from his friends. Yet driven, all through junior high and high school, Ted tried his best to draw Jill to him. He carried her books after class, sat

beside her in study hall, dogged her from a wistful distance, but all she ever gave him in return was casual friendship.

Through those adolescent years, Ted ached for her. He watched her with other boys, flirting and dating as all the other girls did, and still he loved her. Once in desperation, Ted tried to get Jill to talk about that night in the schoolyard.

"Don't you remember?" he asked. "How the angels put our souls together? For heaven's sake, Jill, how could you ever forget it?"

"Stop it," she said, "don't talk about such crazy things. That's too weird."

"But what was it all about?" he pressed. "What did the angels do to us? I can't believe you don't feel the same way they made me feel about you. They merged our souls!"

His look pleaded with her for some sign of understanding, but all he felt back was her growing discomfort and anger, even a hint of fear.

"I mean it, Teddy," she warned, "you better quit talking about that. I don't want to hear it. Just leave me alone."

Bewildered by her denial, Ted backed away at last. Mere friendship wasn't what he wanted, so he withdrew. But in their senior year, when Jill broke up with her boyfriend, she sought Ted out again, and this time he relented. They even dated sporadically, but without the least hint of romance. Once he resigned himself to being only friends, a different kind of closeness steadily grew. He took no chances, never again mentioned the night with the angels, and tried to feel satisfied that Jill now trusted and relied on him as her confidant. From time to time he thought about the merging of their souls, wondering why the magic of the angels hadn't worked with Jill.

His high school years passed in this way, and no one was aware of Ted's loneliness. Outwardly, Ted was jovial and content, no different from the other students. But his nights, his dreams, set him apart. One recurrent dream always seemed compelling, even portentous. The first time it came to him was shortly after the angels took him to the schoolyard, and it recurred three or four times a year after that.

The dream always seemed the same. Ted found himself

floating up gently from his bed and through the ceiling. Traveling at a great speed, he passed through lights, momentary streaks of brilliant color, and then he was looking down on a sagebrush desert area, with snowy mountains in the distance. Below, an old Grayhound-type bus, inexplicably painted yellow, moved along a small road.

Ted felt himself drop through the roof of the bus into a seat about halfway back from the driver. Several other people were on the bus, too, but they ignored him. The bus drove north toward the mountains for a while, and then it suddenly hesitated and came to a stop on the pavement, as if waiting for something. Curious, Ted walked up to the front and peered through the windshield. Ahead he could see cowboys on horseback, herding hundreds of sheep across the road. He walked back to his seat, and as the heat inside the bus had increased, he opened the window.

A small chuckwagon rolled by, and Ted heard a strange language spoken by its passengers. Finally, the last of the sheep cleared the road, and once again the bus started north. The land was beautiful. Ted saw a crystal-clear creek not far from the road, where a few men were fishing, and the mountains grew larger and more magnificent as the bus traveled on.

Then the road curved around into a beautiful bowl-shaped valley, ringed by the snowy mountains. To Ted, the place looked like paradise, an earthly scene of heaven, a land of pure wonder. The bus passed by several grand buildings that reminded him of Swiss chalets he'd seen in pictures, and then it came to a stop beside the largest building in the valley. It looked to be made of rough redwood. Ted got off the bus, walked straight to the side of the building, and then inexplicably reached out to scratch his fingernail across the surface, feeling a sense of surprise.

The dreamscape changed, and Ted saw himself wearing some sort of uniform. A middle-aged man was talking to him, but Ted couldn't make out the words. There was a woman with light brown hair nearby, dressed in a maid's outfit, and he also saw a chubby, smiling woman sitting behind a cashier's desk. He was in a small room cluttered

with trays, and beyond that was a huge dining area filled with guests. A band played dance music in the background, and through the window Ted could see a frozen rink where skaters wove smoothly among one another on the ice.

That's where the dream always ended. What it meant, Ted didn't know, but each time it returned the details were identical. He treasured those dreams that were such a beautiful part of his private world, throughout high school and into his first year of college. He didn't have Jill, but at least he had the magnificent valley, if only in his dreams.

After high school, Ted enrolled at the University of Alabama. Jill decided upon another college, but they maintained their friendship with frequent letters and phone calls. His heart still responded only to her, so that at a time when most young men would be dating a number of girls, Ted had no interest in campus romance. Besides, he was rather in awe of those sophisticated students with whom he attended classes. They all seemed to have done so much more, traveled to different places, to have lived more exciting lives than he had. All he'd really ever known were the farms and small towns of backwoods Alabama.

He had never been taught to question his life or his place in the world. People planted their crops, worked at their jobs, tended their families, and went to church on Sundays, and that was the meaning of existence. But college life exposed Ted to other possibilities. Students from bigger towns like Tuscaloosa and Birmingham knew a lot more than Ted, and he became curious to know more himself. Whatever strange events that had occurred in his past were forgotten in the dazzle of his present new world, and he felt the first stirrings of an exploring mind. He wanted to discover a greater universe than that which he'd known on the farm.

Toward the end of his second year, some of Ted's friends began to talk about their summer plans, and he realized that like most of them, he, too, needed help to pay for schooling. That meant finding a job, something he had never had to think about before. His roommate told him about the fun he'd had working at a resort, and the idea caught Ted's imagination.

That spring, then, Ted went to the student placement office on campus to meet with a counselor. He sat in the waiting room, listening for his name to be called, and thumbed through magazines. As he scanned the pages disinterestedly, an advertisement grabbed his attention. It was a picture of a mountainous area, with ponds for ice skaters and snow-covered slopes upon which glamorous people skied.

"Come to Sun Valley, Idaho, for the vacation of a lifetime," the caption read.

Ted was mesmerized by the scene. He decided that Sun Valley was the resort for him, and when he was ushered into the counselor's office, he laid the magazine down before her and announced his desire to work there.

"You and every other kid in America," she replied. "I've been in this office for years, Ted, and we've tried many, many times to get summer jobs in Sun Valley for our students, but we've never succeeded. Never."

"But I really want to work there," Ted insisted. "Surely there's some way you can help."

She shook her head. "That's where the rich people take their vacations, and lots of celebrities have homes there. The wealthiest people use their connections to get jobs for their own children, that's how exclusive the place is. Once we persuaded a congressman to pull some strings for us, but he failed, too."

Watching Ted's face fall in disappointment, the counselor tried to be realistic yet encouraging. "It's a waste of time, Ted," she said gently. "Let's focus on what we can do, not on the impossible. I have several places you might be interested in, though. Any one of them would be fun."

She took out a folder and leafed through job listings, showing Ted a variety of resorts and vacation ranches in the south. And she gave him application forms, telling him to fill them out and return them to her for mailing the following week.

Ted dutifully filled out the forms. When he went back a few days later to turn them in, however, he was still thinking of the beautiful place he had seen in the ad. That photo had captured his heart, and he couldn't give up on it.

"I know you don't want to do this," he told the counselor wistfully, "but I'd really appreciate it if we could send a letter out to Sun Valley anyway, just for the heck of it."

The counselor sighed and then shrugged. "If it will make you feel better, we will," she finally replied. "But don't be too disappointed, Ted. I've already explained the situation to you."

"Yes, ma'am," he nodded.

"Now, you probably won't hear anything back from these resorts for a couple of weeks. And if nothing comes through on the first try, I'll make a phone call for you to one place where I do have a good connection, a ranch in Georgia." She smiled as Ted turned to leave. "We'll get something for you by summer, I assure you."

The semester was drawing to a close, and after mailing out his applications, Ted had to concentrate on preparations for final exams. It was a time of anxiety as students hurried through their tests and began packing up to leave for the summer. Ted watched this activity enviously, for unlike the others he didn't have anywhere to go. His family had recently moved into Tuscaloosa, so Ted lived at home while going to classes. Without a summer job elsewhere, he'd have to spend those months there, too.

One day after finishing a final exam, Ted came home and was greeted at the door by his mother. She handed him a telegram, and Ted ripped it open curiously.

As he read the words, his eyes grew wide, and then he broke out in a huge grin. "Your application to Sun Valley accepted," he read aloud. "Notify of day you can start, no later than June 1." There was a name at the bottom and a phone number he was advised to contact.

Wonderful forces seemed to be at work in his world, he felt, for his impossible wish had been granted. The beautiful picture in the ad flashed into his mind, and he imagined himself as one of the skiers flying down those snowy slopes. He'd never skied before, but so what? The world was a miraculous place, after all, and there was nothing he couldn't do.

Ted immediately dialed the number in the telegram and reached a railroad office. The railroad owned the Sun Valley

resort, he found out, and they would arrange his transportation there at no cost.

"Let me know what day you can leave," the manager told him, "and the nearest train station."

"That would be Birmingham," Ted replied.

"Fine. When you get everything set, call me and I'll have a rail pass waiting for you."

Ted hung up the phone in a daze. The rest of the day, he was so excited that he couldn't concentrate on anything –studying was out of the question–and he almost failed the next exam. As soon as there was a break in his schedule, Ted took the telegram and rushed to the placement office.

"Look!" he announced joyously, waving the telegram in the counselor's face. "I did it! They gave me the job!" He could hardly contain himself as the dumbfounded counselor read the precious piece of paper, wondering who this young man might be and what made him able to achieve the impossible.

In spite of his exuberance, though, Ted had no real grasp of how unusual this job offer was. He thought only of all the plans he had to make. After completing the last exam, Ted packed a few of his belongings and went to Birmingham, picked up his pass, and began the two-day journey to Idaho. It might as well have been the moon, his parents feared, apprehensive about the great distance that would separate them from their son. But Ted was looking forward, not back at what he was leaving behind. He was too naive to imagine what a very different person he would be the next time he saw his parents.

The long train ride was never boring to Ted, as he watched the familiar countryside pass away. Gone were the pine forests and hot rural farms, replaced by vistas that widened and flattened out across the great plains to the west. Then these, too, were transformed when the majestic Rocky Mountains emerged, looming far ahead. He watched, enraptured, letting the train carry his body forward and upward, into forested altitudes as his spirit soared even higher.

His old reality seemed to fade away until Ted felt as if he were in some waking dream. And when two thousand miles

lay behind him, separating him from his past, the train pulled into Shoshone, Idaho, and Ted stepped down into a new world.

The station manager gave him directions to a bus station, explaining that the rest of the trip to Sun Valley would be by road. Ted walked through the small, sparse town, so foreign to his experience, and tried to absorb every new detail. The landscape had a different color, the people on the streets dressed in ways Ted had never seen before, even the air smelled new and strange, and he relished it all. He was proud of himself, impressed by his own audacity and adventure in taking on such a great unknown.

A couple of hours later, the bus arrived at the station, and Ted froze in place as he watched the huge, yellow Greyhound-type vehicle pull into the loading zone.

"No," he told himself, "it can't be," and he shook off the eerie feeling that had begun to move up his spine.

He loaded his luggage on board, and the old bus lurched off northward. Ted could see snowy mountains ahead in the distance, like beacons. As the journey continued, he settled back for the ride, and that was when he noticed his position, halfway back from the driver. Looking around, he saw that the few other passengers were absorbed in their own thoughts, paying him no attention.

Ted felt strange, almost disoriented, as the entire scene set up an echo in his mind. And then the bus braked and pulled to a slow stop. He sat there a moment, fighting a growing sense of apprehension, until he glanced out the window and saw that the road ahead was filled with sheep. Hundreds of them, herded by cowboys on horseback. He couldn't make a sound, he could hardly breathe, and when a small chuckwagon rolled by, Ted actually felt faint. Through the open window, he heard the strange language of the cowboys, unknown words he'd heard so many times before.

"What are they saying?" he whispered to another passenger. "Why are they talking so funny?"

"They're Basques, from Spain," the person replied. "They herd sheep all over this region."

The sheep traversed the road, and the bus resumed its

journey. Off to the side ran a sparkling stream, where fishermen cast their lines in mute concentration, and Ted watched them in stunned silence. The road curved around the base of the snowy mountains and then opened up into the beautiful bowl-shaped valley that Ted knew would be there. He was no longer apprehensive, but the amazement that gripped him was thrilling.

Scattered throughout the valley were elegant buildings that might have been transported there from the Swiss Alps, and small lakes dotted the landscape, sending up glittering reflections of the mountains ringing the valley. The bus stopped in front of the largest building, a huge structure faced in rough redwood.

When he stepped down from the bus, Ted was moving under some other volition than his own. His luggage forgotten, he walked directly to the nearest wall of the Lodge, reached out his hand, and scratched a fingernail against it. The redwood was an illusion, he discovered in surprise, chipping away the paint to reveal the cement reality beneath it. Very clearly, Ted should have learned that appearance was not always what it seemed, but he was too shocked to take note of the lesson.

Playing out the well-rehearsed scenario, Ted was propelled forward, to the personnel office, where the manager handed him a key to the employee dorm. The next stop was at the Lodge office to get his assignment as a busboy in the room-service division, and Ted stared at the uniform he was given, remembering how often he had seen it before.

Whatever happened after that, his unpacking in the dorm room and falling asleep immediately upon hitting the bed, Ted could never remember clearly. But the next morning when he went to report for his first day on the job, he almost fell over in surprise as a middle-aged man greeted him and took him around to meet the other employees. There was the brunette waitress in her familiar Lodge uniform, there was the chubby, jovial cashier behind her well-known desk. He turned and looked into the great dining room where guests chatted, spotting the bandstand in the background. And then he was guided by Bert, his new boss, back into the work area,

filled with empty trays.

A thought, so distant as to be almost imperceptible, whispered in his mind.

See and believe. You are watched over. You are special. You are ours. It is we who have given this to you. We will give you more.

He didn't really know if he had heard these words or imagined them, but Ted did feel special. He wondered who had brought him all those dreams about this valley. Whom could he thank?

No matter where he turned, Ted couldn't escape from the dream that was unfolding, in every last detail, all around him. And he didn't want to escape. His paradise valley was real, and Ted found himself welcomed into a literal heaven on earth at last.

Eight

I had a dream which was not all a dream.
Lord Byron

There are moments in life when everything changes. We turn a corner, make a choice, and the path we were on is left behind forever.

In Ted's life, that moment came when he arrived in Sun Valley. For years he'd been shown a dream in which every detail of this moment was clear, but he had no idea of its importance. And he never realized that some force was at work, shaping his life for unknown purposes. When unusual things had occurred before, Ted simply dismissed them from his mind, for there was no larger context into which they fit or made sense. He had even come to think that his meeting with the angels who merged his soul with Jill's must have been merely a dream. For Jill, after all, hadn't responded with transformed emotions as he had.

But now, watching his recurrent dream emerge into living reality in Sun Valley, Ted felt his understanding of the world shaking. What was it, he kept wondering, that had shown him those dreams? What had brought him here to this place and given him the position that so many others before him had tried and failed to obtain?

That initial wonderment soon passed, however, as the dazzling surroundings and fast pace of life in Sun Valley bewitched him. It was nothing like the life he had back in Alabama. He was on his own for the very first time, a young man easily accepted by the other employees, making friends from all over the country and rubbing elbows with people of

importance and fame. How could he not be impressed by it all? Out on the rink he watched Peggy Fleming skate, and in the Lodge he served such celebrities as Andy Williams, Ann Southern, and Lucille Ball. He got to know the Hemingway family, whose home in Ketchum made them frequent visitors to the valley. And he was even called upon to baby-sit with the children of the famous guests, such as Janet Leigh's young daughter, Jamie Lee Curtis.

He was also surrounded by another wonderful attraction, the overwhelming beauty of the place. Ted spent much of his summer wandering through the mountains, exploring the nature trails that led far from the valley into a world of wild majesty and tranquil isolation. The little cottonpatch kid who had once chased rabbits in the fields now roamed through mountain meadows with a renewed appreciation of the great creative force of the universe. Sometimes as he lay back to rest from the climbing, Ted gazed down upon the valley below and felt that he was peering into paradise.

The summer passed by swiftly and happily. Ted's job at the Lodge was so enjoyable that he almost felt guilty to be paid for it. His coworkers were friendly and stimulating, and among them Ted was rather special, with his unique southern drawl and infectious good humor. Every day was so filled with excitement and fun that he didn't think about tomorrow, until at last the summer season began to draw to a close.

One day in August, Ted's boss Bert called him over to discuss plans for organizing the winter-season crew. He needed to know who would be available after the month-long shutdown before the Lodge reopened in October. Ted suddenly realized that his stay in paradise was about to end, and for the first time since arriving he had to think about going back to Alabama and the university.

Every time he thought about boarding the train and heading south, he felt sick. His whole being resisted the idea, and finally he sat down to write a letter home, informing his family that he would not be coming back. It was the opportunity of a lifetime, he explained, where he could take advantage of free skiing privileges, flying down the winter slopes with

movie stars and moguls. He had new friends from all over the world, he told them, and besides, the university would always be there. Nothing would make him leave, he insisted, at least not yet.

Ted also wrote to Jill, for the first time since arriving in Sun Valley, and let her know of his plans. She replied immediately, berating Ted for not contacting her sooner with such great news.

"If I had known you were taking this job," she wrote, "I would have come out to Idaho with you for the summer."

Surprised by this enthusiasm, Ted wrote again, explaining how quickly the job offer had come, that he simply hadn't had time to inform her. He said he missed her, that he cared about her as much as ever. And he pointed out how little they'd actually seen each other anyway, with the distance between the two universities they attended.

Ted thought it odd that Jill would have wanted to accompany him to Idaho, since there had never been any romance between them, but he didn't dwell on her letter. Instead, he looked forward to the break between seasons in which he could travel a bit and see even more of the country. All thoughts of Alabama were forgotten.

A few days before his vacation started, however, there was a knock at Ted's door. He opened it and saw Jill standing there with a smile and a suitcase.

"Hi," she said, giving him a quick hug, "I missed you. I've got a couple of weeks before school starts, and everything you wrote about this place just sounded fantastic, so I wanted to see it for myself. Aren't you glad I'm here, Teddy?"

"Well, sure," he replied, once the shock of the moment passed. "But why didn't you let me know you were coming?"

"I wanted to surprise you!" she laughed. "You're going to have a break soon, aren't you? We can have a great time before I go back home." She hugged him again, and Ted felt a renewal of familiar feelings of love for her.

"Yeah," he said, "we can have a wonderful time, Jill."

Ted took her on a tour of the valley, proudly introducing her to his friends, flattered that she had come so far just to be with him. He showed her around as if he owned the place.

Everyone seemed to like Jill immediately. Even Bert warmed to her after a few minutes, going so far as to offer her a waitressing job if she wanted to stay on for the winter. Ted laughed at the prospect, but Jill's prompt acceptance of the offer caught him by surprise.

"What about school?" he sputtered, "and what will your family say, for heaven's sake?"

"I don't care what they think," Jill said. "If you can stay out here and forget about college for a while, so can I. You're my best friend, Ted, and we'll have a great time together."

Ted didn't argue any more. With Jill in Sun Valley, his paradise would be perfect. The love he had felt for her since he was fourteen had never died. And when the Lodge closed down for September, Ted and Jill set off to explore the world. They traveled west through Utah, Oregon, and Washington, places they never dreamed they would see. All the restraints of their past were broken, the world was new and unlimited, and they were answerable to nobody but themselves.

Somewhere along their journey, Ted and Jill crossed another boundary, moving from friends to lovers. It seemed to Ted there was nothing more he could ask from life, and he thanked the angels who had destined them for one another. They drank in everything, the new sights, new cities, and their new relationship. When the vacation ended, they rode back to Sun Valley, exhausted but exhilarated, to prepare for the winter season.

It was a non-stop round of fun, punctuated only by easy stints on the job. Many of Ted's summer friends had stayed on for the winter, and there were other new employees to meet. Camaraderie was high as they all trooped into town after work, to dance and drink and party in the local bars with the energy of youth.

Jill especially loved the night life, and although she and Ted had never been exposed to such freedom, or perhaps because of that, she grabbed it recklessly. The quiet, proper young girl Ted had loved in Alabama transformed into an outgoing woman full of zest, who could drink and dance until the bar closed down.

Ted's stamina, however, soon reached its limit. At first he

partied and drank with sheer exhilaration, but coming home drunk every night, grabbing a few hours' sleep in his room and then trying to work his shift with a hangover soon diminished his enthusiasm. He was young and healthy, but keeping up with Jill, he came to realize, could kill a horse. The next night when Jill came to get him for their usual trip into town, Ted suggested they stay home instead and get a little rest for a change.

"But I'm not tired," she laughed. "Come on, everybody's already down there. Let's go."

"No, really, not tonight," he shook his head. "They won't miss us this once."

"Well, I'll miss them!" Jill said with a hint of anger. "What do you want to do around here, anyway? Read?"

"Yeah, maybe I will," he replied. "But you go on if you like, with everybody else, and maybe I'll see you later." He could tell Jill was determined to party, and just because he wasn't didn't mean that she shouldn't have some fun.

"Fine," Jill said flippantly. "Enjoy your book, Ted." Then she was out the door and gone without a backward look.

He felt guilty for a moment. Jill was young and free, determined to make up for all the years she'd spent being serious and responsible and good. If she wanted to overindulge a little, Ted told himself, well, then, why not? He understood, or at least he thought he did.

But he was more mature himself, an old hand at this fast-lane living, with four whole months of freedom under his belt. He was a veteran now of making life-changing decisions, and when he had opted to drop out of college, Ted had begun to see other possibilities for the future. As he watched the daily operations of the Lodge, he was surprised to find that the business side of things actually interested him. While in college, his studies had no particular direction, and career decisions seemed far in the distance.

Observing an enterprise like Sun Valley Lodge from the inside was an eye-opener. He had always had a good head for numbers, and he soon realized that such a skill could be made to pay. The financial and practical side of business was easy for him to grasp. It seemed a good idea to find out all he

could about it, so Ted began to study. He was over twenty years old, and it was time to think about his future.

Someone had given him a book, *THE PETER PRINCIPLE*, by Laurence J. Peter, and that night he read the first few pages with rapt attention. A knock at the door sometime later surprised him, and Ted glanced up. The clock said it was much later than he thought.

The door opened, and Jill walked in, a bit wobbly. "Hey, Ted," she said, "you really missed the fun tonight." She plopped down on the bed and reeled backward, laughing as Ted reached out to catch her.

"Yeah, and you're going to hurt tomorrow," he replied. "I'm putting you to bed before you fall down and break something. Come on, hold on to me."

He got her to her feet and started down the hall to the women's wing, but Jill was difficult to control in her inebriated condition.

"Wish you had been there," she said, bouncing against him playfully. "I woulda had lots more fun with you."

"If you had had any more fun," he told her, "you'd be crawling, Jill."

They squeezed through the doorway into her room, and Ted helped her lie down in the dark. She tried to say something as he pulled a blanket up over her, but then she rolled over and passed out.

The next night, Ted went with Jill to the bar, and this time he made a point to notice just how much she drank. When she ordered the fourth one, he suggested than maybe she had had enough, but Jill ignored him. By the time she finished off her fifth, Ted couldn't get her to sit down. She wanted to dance, and if Ted wouldn't do it, there were plenty of others who would.

"No," he insisted. "Let's go home now. You've worn me out."

Jill pulled away defiantly. "Forget it," she said. "You're not any fun. What's wrong with you?"

"I can't do this any more," he replied in exasperation. "I've had enough, and I'm leaving. If you want to come with me, you better get your things now."

He turned to go, but Jill didn't budge. Ted hesitated only a moment and then walked out the door alone. Snow had started to fall, but he hardly noticed. The chill he felt was somewhere in his heart. His hand went up to his chest, and for a brief moment he thought of the angel's touch there. The Jill he had been made to love was not the girl he'd just left in the bar,

After work the next evening, Ted wondered if Jill would come down and ask him to go out. By nine p.m. when she hadn't appeared, his curiosity won out, and he went to the women's wing. Jill's room was empty. It was much later when she finally showed up at his door, slightly inebriated, and made a conciliatory gesture.

Nothing more was said after that, but they both knew the old routine had changed. Jill went to the bar most nights by herself or with some of the others; Ted stayed home; and then Jill would pop in for a quick good-night when she returned. During the day, their relationship seemed the same, though, and Ted hoped the crisis was over.

One night when he had nothing in particular to do, he decided to go down to the bar and surprise her. He trudged through the cold night into town, and by the time he reached the bar he was ready for a warming drink and maybe a work-out on the dance floor.

He moved from table to table, looking for Jill without any luck. Finally one of his coworkers waved him over, and Ted sat down.

"It's been a while since you were out here," his friend remarked. "Let me pay for that one, okay?" he offered as Ted ordered a beer, his usual indulgence, from the waitress.

"Thanks," Ted said. "You haven't seen Jill, have you?"

"Nope, not tonight," the friend replied. "Thought maybe the two of you were having a private party."

Ted laughed and shook his head. Everyone knew that he and Jill were a couple, but since she'd been coming to the bar alone, their intimate late-night romancing had waned. That's why he was there now, hoping to share Jill's fun and then return to the dorm together. Really together, for the first time in weeks.

He had a couple of beers and waited for an hour or more, watching for her. But at last it was obvious that Jill was elsewhere, so reluctantly he walked back to the Lodge alone.

It was almost one a.m. by the time he arrived. Before going to his own room, Ted stopped by Jill's and started to knock. The muffled sound of voices inside made him hesitate a moment, but he tapped lightly and pushed the door open.

In the dim light, the first thing he saw was his roommate, Gary, sitting on the couch with his arm around someone. Jill. They were kissing, but when the door opened they both looked up in surprise. Jill started after him as Ted backed slowly out of the room, but the look on his face warned her not to follow.

Thirty minutes later, Ted was back in town, at the first liquor store he saw. Then he went on, to a small hotel, checked in, and proceeded to empty the bottle he had bought. He couldn't quit crying, and the alcohol didn't stop his pain, but at last he passed out on the bed.

Two days later when he finally returned to the Lodge, Bert was alarmed and angry.

"Where the hell have you been?" he demanded. "You missed your shift yesterday, and you don't look like you can work today, either. That's not like you, Ted, to be so irresponsible."

"I'm sorry," Ted said miserably. "You know I'm always on time, Bert. I've never let you down before. But this was personal. I had to have some time alone to think about things. Am I fired?"

"No, you're not fired," Bert replied, and from the tone of his voice, Ted guessed that his boss must have heard something about the situation. "You're one of my best workers, I think I can let it go this time. But make sure I know where you are before you disappear again, okay?"

"Okay," Ted nodded. "It won't happen again. Thanks, Bert."

When his shift ended, Ted reluctantly headed for the dorm, uncertain what would happen when he confronted Gary. That was the first thing he had to get through. Dealing with Jill was more than he could think about just then. But

when he got to his room, it was clear that Gary had moved out. In a way, Ted was relieved, but part of him wanted the confrontation. He had been betrayed by a good friend, and he wanted to know why.

Gary wasn't hard to find. Half an hour later they were alone together in Gary's new room, and when Ted looked at his friend's embarrassed expression, his anger relented.

"Man, I'm really sorry. Really sorry, Ted," Gary said. "I know that's not much help."

"I trusted you," Ted said. "Jill was my girl, and you were my friend. How could you do that to me?"

"Listen," Gary replied, "I never meant for this to happen. But Jill can be real persuasive. She brought a bottle down to the room, looking for you, but I was there, and she stayed a while."

"Didn't you think about me?" Ted asked. "If you wanted a girl, there are plenty around here besides mine!"

"Sure I did," Gary argued, "I even asked Jill why she was flirting with me when she was your steady. And you know what? She just laughed and said she didn't belong to you, that she loved you like a friend, that's all. She said she was free do to what she wanted, and so were you."

Ted didn't listen to any more. He walked away, determined to find Jill and hear it for himself. He couldn't believe that her interest in Gary was serious, in spite of what he'd seen in her room. The only way he would really know was to see her face, look into her eyes, and listen to her explanation. If she had one.

By the time he found her, Ted's obsessive need for Jill was raging, and he was desperate to believe anything she said. He wanted her back, the old Jill who loved him, whose soul had been merged with his. If she said she was sorry, he knew he would forgive her.

Jill didn't look pleased to see him when he walked into her room.

"What do you want?" she asked angrily.

This wasn't what Ted expected, and for a moment he couldn't answer. "I want to know what happened," he finally managed to say.

"What do you care?" she flared. "You've ignored me for weeks. All you do is work and read and wander around in the mountains by yourself. I want to live it up and have fun! And I'm going to! The guys around here know how to have a good time, even if you've forgotten.

"I'm finally away from that small southern town, with everybody meddling in my business. My family just smothered me. For the first time in my life, I feel free and alive, and I'm going to enjoy every minute of it, with or without you."

"But, Jill, what about us?" Ted pleaded. "What does this mean? How can you say this? You know we're meant to be together."

"Look," she said, "we grew up together, schooled together, churched together, so of course I love you, Ted. How could I not love you, you're my best friend? And I've tried to love you the way you wanted. But all of this business with the angels and our souls being merged, Ted, that's *your* obsession. Those were *your* angels, not mine!"

Like a dry twig breaking underfoot, Ted felt something snap inside. He waited for the surge of pain he thought he would feel. Jill had finally and completely rejected him, but astonishingly the pain was gone. Her words, honest and brutal, had freed him, and there was nothing left of her soul in him, not any more. The obsession was over.

Nine

...my soul hath power to know all things,
Yet is she blind and ignorant in all.
Sir John Davies

Jill left before Christmas. The holiday season was one of the busiest times at the Lodge, and Ted took on extra shifts at work, leaving himself less time to think, or hurt. But the hour always came when he couldn't ignore his loneliness. Questions and doubts crowded him, borne for the first time from his heart as well as his mind. How did a God work, he wondered, with angels who could make such a colossal, messy mistake? How could a loving God choose to bind him, his very soul, to a woman who would bring such misery upon them both?

The obsession was broken, the angels had failed. Throughout the winter, Ted withdrew, isolated in his own thoughts, coming to terms with the meaning of betrayal and loss. He had little contact with his friends and sought instead a world beyond the human. There were always the mountains, ringing the valley like monuments to calm endurance, and for Ted they were a place of healing.

In time, then, he came back to himself. The pain matured into experience, and Ted was able to rejoin the social world of the Lodge with renewed gusto. His good humor returned, but there was a new seriousness belying it and new questions that Ted could not yet formulate. All he knew for sure was that things in the world were capable of illusion. Things could appear to be one way yet in reality be something altogether different. Cement could look like redwood. Like Jill's love. Like the soulmating of the angels. The loyalty of a

friend. He knew the world was not what he saw with his senses, but he didn't know what lay beyond or behind it. And he didn't know how to find out.

Still, with all the recuperative qualities of health and a strong spirit, Ted got back into the swing of parties and friends. He skied down the winter slopes as often as he could get away from the job. He quit thinking about Jill every day, pushing it all farther and farther behind him, until at last the ache felt dim and remote.

His friends welcomed back the old Ted, and he threw himself into everything, including his work, with a zest. In addition to his room-service employment, he was frequently hired out by the Lodge to cater private parties for some of the valley's most prestigious guests. There, winter was a time of non-stop social gatherings, and everyone who was anyone, from movie stars to international tycoons, gave at least one big bash before the season ended.

One of the most genial families wintering in Sun Valley were the owners of a pharmaceutical company, whose large chalet was a crown jewel of the resort area. And when their turn came to host the big party, they hired the Lodge caterers. Ted was one of a dozen employees sent to the chalet, all dressed in their best uniforms.

His job was to serve drinks to the hundred or so guests gathered at the luxurious home, and his buddy Robert tended the bar. As Ted brought in the drink orders, he noticed that several guests asked for a drink that looked quite enticing, garnished with an orange slice and a cherry. They called it an Old Fashioned, something Ted had never heard of, and he thought it looked delicious.

"What's that taste like?" he asked Robert as he loaded another round of glasses on the tray.

"Super," Robert said. "You want me to fix you one?"

"I'm not supposed to drink while I'm working," Ted replied hesitantly, eying the glasses.

"Who's going to know?" Robert smiled. "Here, I'll fix it, and you just set the glass out of the way somewhere. Then you can sneak over for a sip whenever you're not busy. Scotch or bourbon?"

"I don't know," Ted shrugged. "What's the difference?" His knowledge of alcohol began and ended primarily with beer.

"Never mind," Robert said. "I think you'd probably like the bourbon."

"Okay," Ted relented, "I'll have one."

When the drink was ready, he took it and slipped around a large potted plant, away from view. Ted sniffed the glass curiously and then stuck his tongue in for a taste.

"Not bad," he thought, "not bad at all." It was so good, in fact, that he downed the entire thing in one long swallow and sauntered out from behind the big plant with a smile. When he'd taken more orders from the guests, Ted went back to the bar.

"So, what did you think?" Robert asked.

"That was great!" Ted said. "I believe I'll have another one."

Robert set him up again, and Ted soon polished off the second Old Fashioned, beginning to feel rather warm and cheery. For the next hour or so, he managed to sneak several more drinks from the bar and still keep up with his duties. The party grew more animated, and so did Ted, who by this time was seeing everything in a happy, rosy glow. He didn't recall ever having enjoyed a catering job so much, moving in and out among the jolly guests with a growing feeling of kinship and camaraderie.

Among the guests arriving just then was Ann Sothern, one of the Sun Valley regulars whom Ted had gotten to know from working some of her private get-togethers. Amused by his great sense of humor and enthralled by his thick Alabama accent, Miss Sothern liked this young man from the south. They had reached such a friendly relationship that she even nicknamed him "Bama" and requested him personally for her parties.

The door opened, and Ted saw Miss Sothern enter.

"Ann!" he called out with a wave, "good to see you!" He was oblivious to the response of the other guests, thanks to the alcohol haze enveloping him. Miss Sothern smiled in recognition and greeted him with a hug.

Ted ran back to the bar and brought her the drink he knew she preferred—as well as another Old Fashioned for himself—and while the party's hosts stared with open mouths, the two of them chatted amiably in the middle of the room. It was impossible not to notice the famous movie star talking and laughing with the uniformed waiter as if they were old friends.

By this time, Ted had forgotten that he was supposed to be serving, not mingling, and when another waiter passed by with a tray full of drinks, he helped himself. Miss Sothern led him over to the sofa, and before long a large group had gathered around them.

"Honey, come here," Miss Sothern called out to a friend, "come listen to this guy talk. He's just wonderful! Listen to this! Bama," she said, turning to Ted, "say something for Mary, dear."

And Ted performed, playing up his downhome drawl for all it was worth. One of the other waiters tried to lure him away from the crowd and back to work, but Ted could have cared less.

"To hell with that!" he laughed, too drunk to realize just how plastered he really was. He was having a great time, the center of attention, and no one at the party enjoyed it more than he did.

Eventually, however, the festivities were over, the guests departed, and the catering crew was left to clean up the debris. Weaving around with a silly grin on his face, Ted watched as all the others loaded up the supplies in the Sun Valley van. All the expensive china and crystal were fitted into tall stacking compartments, and then the employees clambered aboard to go back to the Lodge. Bert, the boss, reached out and grabbed Ted by the coat, pulling him inside.

Even in his condition, Ted noticed that Bert wasn't smiling. In fact, he glared at Ted with a very angry expression as the van rolled off down the road. It wasn't easy for Ted to remain upright in the moving vehicle and to think at the same time, but he held onto the side rails and bobbed along, wondering what was wrong with his boss.

Bert glowered at him with fire in his eyes. "I just want to

know what you've got to say for yourself," he muttered angrily.

Ted looked at him blankly, gave a little lurch, and then vomited explosively all over everything. The other employees jumped away, and Ted fell back sprawling into the stacks of dishes. The back door of the van flew open under his pressure, and trays full of china and crystal bounced out, trailing broken glass in the wake. Miraculously, nobody tumbled out in the uproar that followed, although Bert was clearly tempted to toss Ted out along with the mess he had made.

It was two full days before Ted recovered, two painful days in which he kept to his bed with ice packs on his head, gobbling medicine made by the hosts of the party, and fervently praying that they wouldn't fire for impertinence on the job. In spite of the pain and humiliation, though, he had relished his fling at the party. He loved the fast pace of the valley, and he didn't ever want to leave. When Bert finally relented and forgave him, Ted was grateful and more devoted than ever to carrying out his duties.

Winter passed, the summer season opened, and the routine of work once again paced his life. If his destiny didn't lie in love, maybe he'd find himself a different challenge, with its own risks and rewards. Ted went back to his business studies in the off-hours with a renewed sense of determination. But some of the habits he developed during his solitary period stayed with him.

He spent much of his spare time hiking through the nature trails, gaining more from his surroundings than from his studies. His heart and soul expanded in nature. Birds and animals came to him willingly and fearlessly, recognizing a kinship with him. Ted saw nothing unusual in this, but his friends, witnessing the rapport between Ted and the wildlife, knew it was remarkable.

The new season brought more new employees, energizing the social scene, but Ted had no desire to find any new romantic interests. He had dealt with Jill, he had got back his emotional balance, and he was in no hurry to risk upsetting it again. His buddies were enough for now, and the things he studied kept him well occupied. As far as he was concerned,

life in his personal paradise was just fine.

But balance, like everything else in the world, can be a fragile illusion. One day, rounding a corner in the hall with an armful of trays, Ted literally lost his equilibrium and banged into a young woman with a clatter.

"Hey, I'm awfully sorry," he said, gathering up the pile of trays from the floor.

"That's okay," she said lightly, and Ted looked up to see an exotically beautiful woman gazing down at him with a smile. She was eighteen, maybe nineteen, he judged, and a perfect beauty. Fine, elegant features, cascading warm, brown hair, skin of a most unusual coppery tan, and dark, dark eyes that hinted of the orient.

Ted was struck dumb in awe, and when the girl passed by him with another smile and a wave, he just nodded. Dressed in a waitress uniform, she disappeared into the hall, and Ted collected the last of the trays and headed into the workroom.

"What happened to you?" one of the other waiters asked. "Run into a bus?"

"No, a girl," Ted grinned. "And just wait till you see her! You're not going to believe this one."

He watched throughout the Lodge complex for the next few days, hoping to see her again. But he had no luck. He wasn't even sure that she worked inside the Lodge itself, with all the other facilities in the valley.

Giving up on his quest, Ted returned to his habit of mountain walks, and on the very first one, about a quarter of a mile up the path, Ted saw the beautiful young woman sitting beneath a tree beside the trail. She was alone, and she waved to him silently, smiling.

Ted waved back and continued up the trail, suddenly shy. He had been very surprised to see her there; he almost never met other hikers at this time of day, and he thought it was a rare coincidence. Ted reconsidered and decided to go back and talk to her, but when he reached the tree, he was again too shy to speak.

At last the woman got up and walked toward him. "Hello," she said, extending her hand, "I'm Maya, and I'm new here. Where are you from?"

"Alabama," he managed to reply. "My name is Ted Rice."

"Your accent is rather different, isn't it?" she laughed.

Ted laughed, too, and relaxed. "Well, yours is pretty different, too," he said. "It isn't southern, but you don't sound like the people from around here, either. Where are you from?"

"Oh, my people live up in the mountains," she replied with a vague wave of her hand. "I'll tell you all about them some time. What brings you to Sun Valley? And tell me all about Alabama."

Her manner was very mature, Ted noticed, considering her young age. She was much more self-confident than most of the girls he knew, and he intuited a strength and serenity in her that put him at ease. They sat down beneath the tree together, and Ted began talking, pleased that this gorgeous woman found him so interesting. He told her of his cotton fields and childhood escapades, even of his dreams of Sun Valley years before his arrival there.

Maya smiled at this account, encouraging him to continue. She watched his gestures and listened attentively, as if each word were important. But when Ted realized that almost two hours had passed, he was a little ashamed of having dominated the conversation. In all fairness, he had tried several times to ask Maya some personal questions and draw her out, but she always replied in generalities and gently steered the focus back upon him.

At last Maya said she had to leave for work, so they parted, and Ted went back along the nature trail alone. As he walked and thought about the chance encounter, he realized that in a very short time he had told her many things about himself. Yet from her all he had learned was her first name and that she came from the mountains. He chided himself for forgetting even to ask her last name.

It was almost a week later before he ran into her again. They were rushing past each other in the kitchen hall, but Ted managed to delay her long enough to ask if they could make a date, maybe go to a movie in town sometime.

"Sorry, Ted," Maya declined, "I have to work tonight."

"What about later, then? Another night. Just name the

date," he persisted. "We can go out any time you'd like."

Maya walked away from him. "Don't worry," she called back, "we'll see each other soon. I promise!" And then she was gone.

Ted left the trays in the kitchen and rushed back to the dining room. He wanted to find out her last name and her dorm, for future reference. But Maya was nowhere in sight. Another waiter passed by, and Ted pulled him aside.

"Hey, Jack, you know that beautiful brown-haired girl that just went through here?" he asked. "In a waitress uniform? Which way did she go?"

"Can't help you," Jack shrugged, "I didn't see anybody like that around here."

"Okay, thanks anyway," Ted said, but he didn't understand how Jack could have missed Maya. He asked the other employees, too, and got the same negative reply.

That's how it always seemed to be, a series of sudden appearances and inexplicable vanishings, with Ted as the only witness. Maya kept her word, and they did run into one another thereafter, although not frequently enough to suit Ted. Days would pass without any sign of her, and Ted would just about give up. Then suddenly there she would be, out on the nature trails as if waiting for him. They would walk together and talk, far away from the Lodge, deep in conversations unlike anything Ted had ever discussed before.

Instead of the usual trivia that made up a young girl's interests and conversations, Maya preferred to talk about feelings and ideas, approaching topics seriously, without the silliness that Ted usually found in eighteen- and nineteen-year-old friends. Time after time, she amazed him with her remarkable insights, or philosophical questions. And she talked about things that Ted had never considered.

"Have you ever wondered what it would be like to fly out into space?" she asked him one day as they lay back looking into the sky. "To really see the stars up close?"

Ted had not thought about it before, but now he did. Gazing up past the clouds, imagining all the billions of bright stars, he wondered what it would be like to fly through them, careening across the cosmos in pure freedom. It was as if

Maya's words had brought that scene into his mind, and it enthralled him.

She continually presented some new thought or idea for Ted to ponder. Maya would lay the idea before him, let him play with it for a while, and then guide him through a process of questioning and assessing. Ted was never aware of her influence while it was being exerted, but later he could see how completely she managed the conversations. There was never an opening for him to question her on personal things, either. His deepest thoughts were expanding as a result of their shared explorations, but Maya herself remained as mysterious as ever.

Ted wondered why she was always alone when they met. Sometimes he would see her in a hallway, rushing off on some errand, and occasionally he spotted her walking between the Lodge and the Chalet. He had described Maya to his friends, of course, but after a while they started teasing him, insisting that he had invented the story, since no one but Ted had ever seen the beautiful Maya. Ted laughed with them, but the more he thought about it, the more suspicious the circumstances seemed.

He also wondered why she was so difficult to find in the relatively small environs of the valley. Just once he wanted to run into her, instead of the other way around, for invariably Maya was the one who did the 'finding.' Ted determined that the next time he saw her, he would get some answers. Where did she live? Where exactly did she work? And why was she always alone?

But the next time he saw her, she wasn't alone. Ted was jogging up a trail, and when he rounded a small bend he saw Maya and another young woman walking toward him. Maya waved, and her smile had a hint of the mischievous about it.

"Hi, there," she called out. "You're late, Ted!"

She had been waiting for him, Ted was certain, but his attention was drawn to the other girl.

"Who's this?" he asked, unable to quit staring at Maya's friend. She might have been her twin, with the same surreal complexion and dark hair and eyes. She was equally beautiful, but in a slightly different way, and when she spoke her

accent echoed Maya's perfectly.

"Hello, Ted," the young woman said. "My name is Lyra. It's nice to meet you. Maya has told me about you."

Ted nodded. "Do you work here, too? I've never seen you in the valley before, and believe me, I'm sure I would have noticed."

"No," Lyra said, "I don't. Maya is my friend. I'm visiting her now, that's all."

Before Ted could ask another question, Maya took Lyra by the arm and walked on down the trail. "You go ahead," she told Ted. "Enjoy your walk. We have to leave now, anyway, I've got to work soon. But I'll see you later, don't worry."

He was tempted to follow them back to the valley, hoping to learn more, but something stopped him. Whenever Maya said it was time to go, he had learned that she didn't want him to go with her. She always left as mysteriously as she appeared. At least he knew one thing more about her, he consoled himself. She had friends, and if Lyra was any indication, there were others like her up in the mountains that Maya called home.

A few days later, she found him again, out walking the trails as usual. They went along together chatting for a while, when Ted noticed that Maya was carrying a large photo album. He stopped beside a tree and motioned for her to sit down beside him.

"What is that?" he asked, pointing at the album.

"Oh, that," she replied, as if she'd forgotten all about it. "I want you to look at this, okay? These are all pictures of friends and some people I know. Here, take a look. I'd be interested in your response."

Maya placed the album in his lap, and Ted flipped through page after page of large photos, mostly formal portraits. There were people of every age, in a variety of settings.

"Are you a photographer?" he asked, thumbing through the pages.

"No," Maya said, "I didn't take these. A friend of mine shot these photos and gave them to me. These are all people I know."

"They're sort of different," Ted remarked. "I mean, a book of pictures of the people I know sure wouldn't look like this. Most of my friends are younger."

"Oh, I know all sorts of people," Maya laughed. "All of them are interesting." She stopped the page to point at a particular picture of a man.

"For instance, look at him," she told Ted. "What do you think of this man?"

"Well," Ted began, staring at the photo, "I guess he looks like a very kind man, a gentle person."

"How do you know that?" Maya asked.

"It's simple," Ted shrugged. "Just look at his eyes. He looks happy, like someone who would be fun in a crowd or a party."

"From what I know of him, you're correct," Maya smiled. She turned to another photo, this one showing a more mature woman.

"This is the mother of one of my friends," she explained. "What do you think about her?"

Ted studied the picture a moment and then sighed. "Heck, I don't really know, but I think she's had a lot of pain. Look at the expression on her face. This woman has been hurt very badly. Has her husband died recently, or something like that?"

He looked up at Maya. "The only time I've seen that expression in my family," he continued, "was when someone had died."

"As a matter of fact, you're right," Maya nodded. "Her husband died not long ago. And this picture was taken right after that. Don't you think it's strange that you would know such a thing?"

She pointed to another photo, of a young girl, and Ted described unhappiness in the girl's family life as well as the presence of some artistic talent. Another photo, another description followed, and they went on and on until Maya had asked Ted about every photo in the album. What did he think of them? What did he see in the picture? How did he see into them? How did he know his impressions were valid?

Finally Maya closed the album, and Ted sat up, feeling a

little disoriented. "Those sure are some interesting friends you've got there," he said. "They all seem like nice people. I'm glad you have such good friends."

It sounded silly, it wasn't at all what he wanted to say after such an experience, but his mind was too rattled for anything more profound. Something didn't feel right inside.

"Good friends," he repeated, "interesting people. Are they all from up in the mountains, too?"

Maya ignored his question. "Do you not realize what you have been doing here, Ted?" she asked.

"Doing what?" he echoed evasively. His heart was racing, and something really didn't feel right.

"Don't you think it's kind of odd?" she went on, "that you know all this information about people you've never met?"

The sensations of a queasy stomach and lightheadedness suddenly reversed themselves in Ted's body, and then he went into a fit of stiff resistance to her probing.

"No, not at all!" he insisted. "There's no trick to that, it's all obvious. Those things I told you, everything I saw, it's very obvious. Look at them!" he pointed, turning the pages furiously. "Just look at them! You can see it all in their eyes, anyone can, for pete's sake. There's nothing odd about that, Maya."

"Oh, I don't know, Ted. It seems rather special to me. You really think such insights are so obvious?" she replied, smiling and unmoved by his outburst. "You really think anyone, everyone, can just look at the face and see the sorts of things you did?"

"Yeah, I guess," he said, faltering. "Why? Don't you?"

Maya took his hands and held them firmly between her own. Her smile deepened, and her eyes locked onto his.

"Did it ever occur to you that maybe you are psychic?"

"That I'm what?" Ted asked. The queasiness was rampant now.

"Psychic," she repeated. "Able to read into people's energy and see information about them. I don't think the things you have told me about these people could have been known to you otherwise."

"But all I did was look at their faces and their eyes," Ted

said. "All the information was just plain obvious. Surely there's no special talent needed to see that."

"It is a talent, believe me," Maya continued, "a very special ability. Your friends down in the Lodge cannot do these things, but you can. How long have you been able to do this?"

"All my life, I guess," Ted replied, bewildered. "I just know things about people sometimes, it's true. But, heck, I thought everybody else knew the same things, too, and just didn't feel like saying anything about it. So I didn't, either."

In the back of his mind, Ted heard his grandmother's words and her warning: "Stay away from such things."

His balance was still shaky, but he was beginning to recover. "Psychic, huh?" he said. "Are you talking about psychics like that woman up in Washington? You know, that Dixon woman in the newspapers, psychic like that?"

"Yes, I've heard of her," Maya told him. "But this is different. Your psychic talent allows you to read people's energy fields."

"What good is that?" Ted asked, puzzled. He had never heard of an energy field, no one he knew had ever talked about psychics, and he wasn't sure what any of this meant.

"That is something I'm certain you will find out," Maya said. "Today, it's enough that you simply know and recognize that you're psychic, Ted."

"How do you know about these things, anyway?" Ted asked. "Where did you learn about psychics and energy fields, and outer space, and all those other things you're always talking about? Who are you, Maya, really? What kind of people do you live with, up in those mountains?"

"Why, people just like Lyra and me, of course," she laughed softly. "We talk about a lot of things, and we study, too, like you used to do in the university, right? There's so much to understand in the world. Isn't it fascinating?"

She rose and gathered up the album. "I'd love to stay longer and talk some more," she said, "but I really can't. It's getting late. I'll see you later, Ted."

Maya waved and then headed off down the trail before he could answer.

Ted sat there, amazed and bewildered, and watched her fade out of sight. Not only had Maya led him to a new recognition of himself, she also had triggered a sensation of emotion that he hadn't felt since Jill's departure. It felt good, intriguing and enticing, but this time it was different. His emotional response wasn't obsessive or controlling, it was unconditional.

Ten

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.
Isaiah

The more Ted thought about Maya's psychic test with the photo album, the more he rejected the notion that he had some special ability. Part of his response was sheer stubbornness. He didn't want to be different from other people, either. He wanted to be a normal guy, have some fun, do a good job, and enjoy his life, that was all. But another part of his mind rejected thoughts of psychic ability because it frightened him, and he didn't understand why.

When Ted tried to dismiss it from his thoughts and found he couldn't, he decided to talk to his friends and get their opinions. But even bringing up the subject was difficult, because no one else ever talked about strange things. Sitting in the break room relaxing one evening with a few other employees, he took a chance and asked, "What do ya'll think about psychic abilities?"

Leanne, Bert, and another waiter, Sydney, reacted in surprise.

"You mean, mind-reading and stuff like that?" Leanne laughed. "You don't believe in it, do you, Ted?"

"Well, no," he hedged, "not really. But this friend of mine, Maya, she told me that I was psychic the other day. And I just don't know what to think."

"What makes her think you're psychic?" Bert asked.

"She gave me a test," Ted told him.

When the others pressed him to explain, he recounted the incident with the photo album. "I told her what I thought about each of the people in the pictures," he concluded, "and

Maya said I was correct. Do y'all think there might really be anything to this psychic stuff?"

"Why don't we do a little test of our own?" Sydney offered. He was a waiter like Ted, but he only worked at Sun Valley in the summers. For the rest of the year, Sydney was a college instructor somewhere along the east coast, and of all the employees, Ted thought that Sydney was probably the smartest and certainly the best educated. So he listened in surprise and curiosity as Sydney explained the sort of test he had in mind.

"You think we could try some experiment that would prove I don't have any special powers?" he asked. He wanted to discredit Maya's test and relieve himself of the uneasiness it had stirred up in him.

"Who knows?" Sydney countered. "Maybe it will prove that you do. Some people do have psychic abilities, they're able to do things that mere chance says they shouldn't. But I would think that it's a rather rare gift, Ted, and I'm pretty doubtful that you or any of us here would have it. Care to try it anyway?"

"Sure," Ted agreed. If there was a good test, he'd fail it, and that would put an end to Maya's talk. He and everyone else would find out that he was just a typical guy.

"All right," Sydney began, "here's what we'll do. I'll choose a number of items, and you try to guess what they are. I'll select five things, one at a time, okay?" He motioned for Ted to move back, and Leanne and Bert gathered in close around Sydney to witness the process.

"You go across the room and turn around," he continued. "I'll give you three guesses on each item, and if you can get even three of them right, out of nine guesses, I'd say that would be a higher than average performance. If you do that well, I'll concede that you might have some abnormal abilities."

The others laughed and joked as Ted crossed the room, and he laughed along with them. There was no way he could guess the objects, he was certain, and they could all have a good time watching him fail. He faced the wall a few moments, while Sydney chose the first item and then called

for Ted to turn around.

"Keep your eyes closed," Sydney directed. "Put your hand up to your forehead and try to clear your mind completely. Shut out all thoughts, Ted, and concentrate. I've got something in my hand. Concentrate on getting an image of that. When something comes to mind, tell us what you think the item is."

A young man's dignity is awkward and fragile sometimes, and Ted felt very silly, with his hand dramatically covering his eyes, but he obeyed Sydney's instructions.

"Tell us, Great Swami!" Bert joked, and everyone laughed, especially Ted.

"Ignore them," Sydney said, "and just focus on getting an image."

Ted squeezed his eyes shut and tried to blank out his thoughts. After a moment he said, "Well, it's long and yellow. Not too big." He paused and then went on hesitantly. "I think, I think, it's a pencil?"

He opened his eyes and looked at Sydney's outstretched hand. In it was a yellow pencil. His eyes widened in surprise, and then he grinned.

"Wow, this is really fun!" he laughed, feeling a rush of excitement. The pit of his stomach winced as it did whenever he rode a roller coaster climbing to the top of the first deep, dizzying dive of speed. He could feel color and heat rising in his face.

"Not bad," Bert said.

"Yeah," Leanne echoed, "you're a great guesser. Do you hire out for private parties?"

Ted laughed again and then turned back to face the wall for a second challenge. Behind him, Leanne and Bert rummaged around for an object. Leanne found a safety pin and handed it to Sydney.

"Turn around, Ted," Sydney said, "and focus on the image of the second item."

Ted pressed his hand to his forehead again and cleared his thoughts. Soon, another image began to appear, but it wasn't as clearly obvious as the pencil had been. He sharpened his concentration and tentatively began to give a

description. Leanne, Sydney, and Bert sat forward.

"It's gray," he began. "No, not gray, silver. Shiny silver, I think. A coin? No, not a coin. A paper clip? It's about the size of a paper clip. You know, like a safety pin."

Ted opened his eyes, and when Sydney handed him the safety pin, he bowed his head in acknowledgement. This time, there wasn't as much laughter from the others as before. Bert just stared at him open-mouthed.

Ted was beginning to enjoy this little test less and less. The rush of excitement he felt when he identified the pencil now felt like a rush of something much less pleasant. This wasn't the way the test was supposed to proceed.

"Two guesses, and two correct answers," Sydney finally said, breaking the silence. "That's pretty amazing, Ted." He looked at the young man before him as if scanning for signs of something that had been overlooked before. His close attention made Ted want to squirm.

"Yeah, this is fun," Ted lied, all his enthusiasm gone. "But it's probably just beginner's luck. I was just lucky."

"Let me choose the third item," Bert said. He seemed to suspect that he was being tricked. Maybe Sydney and Leanne and Ted had all cooked this thing up, he wondered, and were trying to pull a joke on him.

"Turn around, Ted," he ordered, "and see if you can guess this one."

Bert made his selection, and when the chosen item was safely hidden in Sydney's hand, he allowed Ted to turn back around.

Eyes closed tight in concentration, Ted began to focus his inner vision, searching for an image. Almost immediately, he saw something.

"Wait a minute, now," he said, "I'm feeling like it's round and small." He made a circle with his fingers and showed them the size. "About like a quarter. Is it a quarter? No, no, it's not a coin, I don't think, because it's sort of rough or jagged around the rim or edge. Like a bottle cap. A Coke bottle cap!"

The image was crystal clear in Ted's mind.

When Sydney opened his fist and the bottle cap gleamed

in the light, nobody in the room said a word. Nobody breathed. Ted could hardly move, and when he finally did, he thought he might faint. His stomach lurched and he felt lightheaded.

Without a sound, he turned and walked out of the service area, into the employee lavatory, where he promptly threw up. Half an hour later, when he was finally able to return to work, no mention was made of continuing the test with the fourth and fifth objects.

In fact, nobody ever mentioned the test again, except Ted, when he described it to Maya. They met on the hillside a few days later, and Ted told her about the professor's test with the pencil, the safety pin, and the bottle cap. He didn't tell her about throwing up, however.

Maya had very little response, which surprised Ted. He thought that surely she would make a big fuss and say, "I told you so," but instead she just smiled and nodded.

"What do you think about that?" he pressed. "Don't you think that's pretty strange?"

"I knew it already," she said quietly, taking his hand.

Looking into her eyes, Ted thought once again just how very mysterious the beautiful woman was, how much older she seemed, older in some ways than anyone else he'd known. There was an ageless, perpetual calm about her. She always focused on him and their conversations, yet she seemed lovingly detached from everything.

They still met frequently throughout the summer, but Ted was aware of a slight change in their relationship. It seemed that after the photo-album test, Maya's concentration on him relaxed. It was as if she'd been working hard at a task, and now that it was accomplished, she could ease up a little.

Ted and Maya became more physical and less mental with each other. They held hands sometimes, or walked through the beautiful nature trails arm in arm, kissing occasionally, easy in one another's presence. Ted loved her, he realized, but he also knew that it wasn't the sort of passionate love he had felt for Jill.

With Maya, Ted could be utterly himself and feel accepted. He loved being with her, and most of all he loved the way

she pushed the limits of his knowledge. She opened up his mind to worlds beyond his imaginings and shared his explorations into them as his spiritual sister. Even as they grew more intimate with each other, their conversations always remained exotic, and she discussed at length such things as the body's ability to heal itself.

"The body knows exactly when something's wrong with it," she once explained. "When we learn how to ask our body for help, when we can have faith in its abilities, a natural healing occurs."

"All I know about natural healing," Ted commented, "is what my grandmother told me. She gathered lots of wild plants out in the woods and used them for tonics and medicines. She could remove warts from people's hands."

"Plants can be very useful," Maya agreed, "but the body also works without them. It's just a matter of the right knowledge."

Ted thought that with Maya, everything seemed to be a matter of knowledge, and he struggled to comprehend the many topics she discussed. He also found another source of information and ideas in the delightful person of a new employee, Samantha. She was the epitome of a 'little old lady,' complete with numerous cats, and she and Ted soon became good friends. He discovered that Samantha was an astrologer, something else he knew nothing about, and he was eager to learn.

Day after day, Samantha discussed astrology with Ted, branching out into other areas of the metaphysical. She taught him about the configurations of the stars. They were sources of energy, she explained, and this energy has a great effect on humans. He began to learn about the human energy field, too, and he wondered if it had anything to do with his strange ability to know things about other people, as Maya had suggested.

By the end of the summer, Ted had been exposed to the rudiments of the metaphysical world, thanks to the two women's influence. Walking along the nature trail one afternoon while telling Maya about some of Samatha's ideas, Ted suddenly remembered an unusual article he'd read in the

paper recently.

"Hey, did you see that news story about a UFO? What do you think about that stuff?" Since Maya frequently discussed outer space, others stars and planets, he thought she would be interested in the article.

Maya stopped and sat down by the side of the trail, looking out into the sky.

"Don't you think it's very probable that other life exists elsewhere in the universe, not just right here?" she asked in return.

"I don't know," Ted replied. "Nobody in Alabama ever talked about seeing them. Guess I never really thought about UFOs before."

"Oh? Well, I've seen a UFO," Maya said. "My friend and I just saw one recently, in fact."

"You and Lyra?" he asked, and she nodded. "Where?" he demanded, as he jumped up and pulled Maya to her feet. "Come on, I want to see one, too. Show me where y'all saw it!"

Maya resisted with a laugh. She pointed up the nature trail. "It's easy to find," she said. "Go up that way and around the next bend. Just a little farther on, you'll see a ridge where two mountains come together. It makes a V-shaped notch on the horizon."

"And that's where you and Lyra saw it?"

"Yes, we were walking up there last week, and we saw a UFO hovering right in that gap, just before dark."

Ted glanced at his watch. "Maybe we ought to go have a look now," he suggested. "It's getting almost late enough."

"No," Maya said, "it's getting so late that I have to go back to work." She started down the trail with Ted following after her reluctantly.

"Boy," he said, "I'd sure like to see one. Just so I would know for myself."

"Try it, then," Maya replied. "We've seen them a few times. If you'll come back out here late in the afternoon, before dark, you might see it. Lyra and I saw it a couple of times at dusk."

"Will you go with me?" Ted asked.

"Well, if I can," Maya hesitated. "But my schedule is so busy, and I have to see my friends a lot. Don't wait for me, go have a look whenever you can."

She ran on down the hill and soon disappeared into the maze of paths and buildings in the valley. With or without his mysterious friend, Ted determined to go back up the trail the following afternoon and look for the UFO.

He kept to the trail until it reached a small bend, and then he walked on farther, scanning the area. At last on the horizon Ted could see a deep gap between two mountains, and through that V-shaped opening he could gaze into the desert.

Satisfied that he'd found the right place, Ted sat back on a comfortable perch and lit a cigarette. His eyes moved steadily across the vista as he waited, but he had no idea what exactly to expect. A shiny, whistling flying saucer? Little green men from Mars, peering out from portholes and waving their antennae at the earthlings below?

He didn't have to wait long. Something did appear, but it wasn't at all what he expected. Right above the gap he saw a dark spot in the air. It was an object, a body of some sort, but it was disappointingly too far away for Ted to recognize any particular shape. He watched silently as the dark object hovered, listening for any identifying sound, but there was none.

Then the object left its stationary position and for several minutes made slow, odd maneuvers, always keeping within the space of the mountain gap. After a while, it turned and leisurely flew away toward the desert. Ted watched until it was no more than a speck against the sky. And then that, too, disappeared.

He sat back against his perch, puzzled. Was that a UFO? he asked himself. No, it was just a dot in the sky, he replied. But it didn't make any noise, it didn't fly the way airplanes do, the argument continued. As a UFO sighting, however, the whole thing was a big disappointment. No lights, no little green men, just a dot in the sky that didn't behave as it should. It was intriguing, sure, but not identifiable. Sort of like Maya, he joked to himself.

Then his mood suddenly changed, and Ted was overcome by fear. He didn't know why, but he was terrified that the

UFO, or whatever it was, might be coming back to get him, and all he could think to do was run away. The sky was dark, darker than it should have been, and he wanted to get out of that place immediately.

Without stopping, Ted ran all the way back down the winding trails and into the valley floor at breakneck speed. He didn't stop until he reached the side entrance of the Lodge, where he hurried inside and up to the dining area that overlooked the skating rink. Out of breath and still shaky, Ted ordered coffee and sat back to rest. He didn't understand what had made him panic, but the fear had been real. Now, in the Lodge, surrounded by people and watching the skaters, everything seemed quite normal.

The next time he ran into her, Ted told Maya what he'd seen and how ambiguous it had been. "If that's a UFO," he finished, "there's not much to them, is there?"

"Oh, that was a UFO all right," Maya assured him. "If you'd been closer, you could have seen the shape and everything."

"How do you know?" Ted asked. "It was just a little, dark spot."

"Lyra and I saw the same thing you did," Maya said, "and we've seen it a few times up close. It's a UFO, believe me."

"Where did you see them before?" Ted asked. "I mean, up close like that?"

"When we were in the mountains," she told him.

"Which mountains?"

"Those," she pointed vaguely, "north of here."

Ted started to ask another question, but Maya changed the subject immediately.

"Listen," she said, "I've been wanting to ask you something. Summer is almost over, you know. When are you going to leave the valley and go back to school?"

Ted was so surprised by the question that he forgot about the UFO. He and Maya had talked about dozens of things, but not about college plans, or any other plans for his future.

"Never, I wish," he said, thinking of how near he would be to Jill if he went back to Tuscaloosa. That whole affair was

still too recent for him to want to see her again. His experience with Jill hadn't killed his belief in God, but it had made him wonder how God's angels could have fouled up his emotional life so badly.

"I really haven't decided," he continued. "Eventually I guess I'll have to go back to school, but what's the rush? I really love what I'm doing here."

"But didn't you tell me you'd been away from home for a couple of years now?"

"Yeah," he nodded.

Maya held his hand and looked squarely into Ted's eyes. "Don't you think," she said slowly, "don't you think it's time you went home to be with your family again? Don't you want to go back to school and get on with your life?"

Before she had spoken, Ted had no intention of returning to Alabama, not for a very long time. But once she took his hand and spoke those words, Ted knew with a surprising certainty that that was exactly what he was going to do. Maya had spoken in a friendly, casual tone, just as always, but the effect of her words had the force of a command. The desire to go home flamed up in him, and when he looked down on the valley below, he saw clearly that his time there was at an end.

"My friends and I are leaving, too," Maya said as they walked back down to the Lodge area. "I'll be sure to see you again before we go, though, don't worry. 'Bye for now!"

Maya disappeared, but the desire for home that she had awakened in Ted remained. There wasn't much time to make all the necessary arrangements, so for the next few days Ted hurried from place to place putting everything in order for his departure. In the midst of all this pressure, however, one afternoon he felt a surprising compulsion to break away and hike up one of the more remote trails beyond the Lodge. He sensed that Maya was up there and that she wanted to see him.

He went, and she was there waiting beside the trail, smiling expectantly as he approached.

"See?" she said, "I told you we'd be together one more time, didn't I? And have you taken care of that business we talked about last time? Are you finally going home?"

"Yeah," he nodded, "in a couple of days. How about you?"

"My friends and I will be leaving next week," she said. "How wonderful that you're going home, Ted! Have you told your parents yet?"

Ted didn't answer right away. As he looked at Maya, he realized sadly that he might not see her again for a long time, and he was very reluctant to say goodbye.

"I wish I could tell you what your friendship means to me," he said. "If it wasn't for you, the way you've listened to me and my problems, I don't know how I would have gotten over Jill. You've made a big difference in my life."

Maya smiled but said nothing.

"I really love you," Ted continued. "You're my best friend, Maya, and leaving you is the hardest part of all."

"You have to go, though," she said. "My friends and I won't be here, anyway, so we couldn't see each other even if you stayed in Sun Valley."

"I know, but we don't have to lose touch," he insisted. "Give me your phone number so I can call when I get back home, okay?"

"You can't call, I'm afraid," Maya replied. "My people don't actually have telephones."

"What? I know you all live up in the mountains, but just where exactly?" he asked.

"A long, long way up in the mountains," she said evasively. "It's really very isolated."

"Well, don't you go to school somewhere?" Ted was becoming very puzzled. How could a group of people live without telephones, so far up in the wilderness, and still have the schools that Maya and her friends attended?

"Yes, I go to school," she answered, "but not exactly like you do."

"What do you mean? You have teachers, right?"

"Oh, yes," she nodded.

"Is the school in a town?" he asked, wondering if he could phone her there.

"No, not a town," she shook her head. "You wouldn't understand.

"You're right, I don't understand," Ted said. "How do you go to school, for pete's sake?"

"We have teachers in our group," was all the explanation Maya gave.

Ted was completely frustrated by that time, yet he stubbornly determined to keep digging.

"I've been up in those mountains, Maya," he said angrily, waving his arm toward the northern snowy peaks. "All the way across the summit! There aren't any towns up there. There aren't any houses. Most of the time you can't even drive across there because of the snow. And you're trying to make me believe that you live up there? I don't understand why you're doing this, because it can't be true!"

"Yes, it is true. All I can say is that it really isn't me, or my choice," Maya told him. "I'm there with my family. They're living up there because we're waiting."

"For what?" Ted asked in bewilderment.

"For something to happen."

"Waiting for what to happen?"

"You wouldn't understand if I told you," Maya replied. "It's far too complicated, Ted, please believe me. But you will understand one day. Let that be enough for now."

"Why do I have to wait?" he argued. "Can't you at least try to explain? I'm not stupid, I can understand a lot of complicated things, you know that by now!"

Maya was unmoved. "You really would not understand," she shook her head. "I'd like to explain it, but you can't grasp it right now. You will someday."

Taking another tack, Ted persisted, this time with questions about her family. "If you don't have telephones," he said, "and you don't live in a town, and there aren't any houses up there, just where does your family live?"

"We live in the mountains," Maya answered patiently.

"In?" Ted echoed, trying to understand. "In the mountains? You mean, actually inside them? Like in a cave?"

"Yes," she said, as if no further explanation were required.

"But how do you get your food? I don't understand any of this!"

"We bring it in and keep supplies," she said.

"Is something bad going to happen, Maya?" Ted asked. "Is that what you're waiting for?"

"No," she said, "no, it's not bad."

"Well, if you don't have a phone, then," Ted went on, "can we at least write to each other?"

"You can't," she replied. "We don't have any mail delivery where we live."

Frustrated at every turn, Ted pleaded with her. "I'm going over two thousand miles away, Maya," he begged, "and you say I can't even write you? I can't call you? You're my best friend, I care about you. I love you! This isn't fair!"

"Don't worry," Maya told him serenely, "you'll see me again. I promise."

He realized that there was nothing more to say, and nothing he could do to change her mind. Taking what comfort he could in her oath, Ted gave her one last hug and then kissed her, and the two friends parted.

Final details kept him busy, but at last everything was arranged and he had his rail pass in hand. His departure from Sun Valley was suddenly less than four hours away.

More than anything, he wanted to see Maya one last time. Ted was bewildered by her insistence that they couldn't stay in contact, and he thought surely there must be a way, if only he could find her again and persuade her before the bus left. He stored his luggage and raced out of the Lodge, but then he stopped, at a loss. Ted had no idea where Maya lived.

He went to the other employee dorms around the complex, but nobody recognized her name. Even when he went from door to door and described Maya, he failed to find one person who knew anything. With time rapidly running out, he realized that the personnel office would know how to find Maya. He raced to the office for help.

John, the director, had come to know Ted well and told him how sorry he was to be losing such a great employee.

"If you ever want to come back and work here," he said, "just let me know."

Ted thanked him impatiently and asked John where Maya lived.

"Who?" John asked. "The name's not familiar."

"You've got to know this girl," Ted insisted. "She's so beautiful you'd have to be blind not to notice her. Believe me, you'd remember." And he described Maya all over again.

John shook his head. "Sorry, Ted, you've got me stumped. Don't you have a last name, at least?"

"No," Ted admitted, "but I know she was a waitress, I saw her in uniform. You're bound to have something in the files."

"We have hundreds of employees. Without a last name," John explained, "there's no way for me to locate her. If she really works here, which I doubt. I've done all the hiring, Ted, and I just don't remember anyone with that name."

Ted's hope was collapsing, but he still had two more hours and he wouldn't give up. He went back through all the dorms, through the Chalet and the Lodge, and finally he ran up to the nature trails, hoping by chance she would be there. But the mountains were empty.

Reluctantly, he returned for his luggage and stood in front of the Lodge, silently saying goodbye to his paradise. One last time he reached out and scratched through the redwood illusion down to the cement beneath it. Then Ted walked slowly to the bus station, all the while scanning the distance for any glimpse of Maya.

The yellow bus of his old dreams arrived, and he had no choice but to get on board. He thought ironically of how very different his emotions had been the first time he rode that bus. Then, it had been the beginning of a dream come true, but the dream had become a nightmare. He had recovered, though, and learned how to feel again. But now the bus had returned, to take him away from everything he had come to love. The machine lurched to life, and as it rumbled down the road Ted gazed out the window unhappily, until the valley disappeared.

Part Three

The Call

We never know how high we are
Till we are called to rise.
Dickinson

I can call spirits from the vasty deep.
Shakespeare

Eleven

I have had a dream, past the wit of man
to say what dream it was.
Shakespeare

The return to Alabama was more than a journey of miles for Ted, it was a transit from one world to another. Except for the painful interlude with Jill, he had reveled in the freedom and excitement of Sun Valley. And he couldn't explain to himself exactly what had driven him away from Idaho. The force of Maya's words, compelling him to return, now seemed like something from a dream.

Everything about his relationship with the strange, beautiful woman also faded into unreality. Back among his friends and family, Ted tried to forget the unsettling experience of testing and proving his psychic abilities, too. He was home once again, for whatever reason, and all he wanted was to put everything paranormal behind him.

Grounding himself in the familiar atmosphere of Tuscaloosa, his family's home, and the university campus, Ted plunged back into what he hoped would be a happy, normal life. He enrolled at the university and took a part-time job. He caught up with old friends and soon made many new ones, getting back into the social rhythm that had been transformed in his absence–as had the rest of young America–by the politics, music, and shifting values of the mid-1960s.

And then he began to have dreams. Not merely dreams, but visions of deaths and disasters that shattered his newly achieved sense of balance.

When he had the first disturbing dream, Ted had no way of knowing that others, more serious, would follow. The first

dream was upsetting enough. As a hobby, his mother raised Chihuahua puppies at that time and was very fond of her two main breeders, Corky and Dolly. She made comfortable quarters for them in the basement of the house, and there were several small puppies for whom she had great hopes. One morning at breakfast, Ted told his mother of the strange dream he'd had during the night.

"I dreamed I got up," he explained, "and went to the basement door because I was concerned about the dogs. I didn't know what was wrong, but I felt that something disturbing had happened to them. I opened the basement door, and that's when I realized that a fire had been burning down there.

"I went down the stairs and walked around their beds," he continued, "and I saw that all the puppies had been burned to death. It was really awful. Then I saw that Corky had been only slightly burned and was still alive. Dolly was injured, too, hovering between life and death. She was in bad shape, but I thought that with good medical treatment Dolly might survive. Still, it was so sad to know that all the puppies were gone."

He was very depressed by the dream, and Mrs. Rice commiserated, but since it had only been a dream, she thought very little about it. And Ted put it out of his mind, too, never thinking that the dream might have had any extraordinary meaning.

In less than a month, however, the Chihuahuas were all stricken by a serious illness. Although the veterinarian did his best to save the pets, one by one the puppies succumbed. Corky was the least affected and soon recovered. Dolly, the favorite, suffered for a long time before finally pulling through, but her health was permanently scarred.

Ted and Mrs. Rice remembered the dream about the fire, and they realized that in some way it had been prophetic of the illness. The realization made them both very uneasy, especially Ted. He didn't want any psychic abilities to show him such sad events, which he could do nothing to change.

There were other dreams, too, just as disturbing. Once he dreamed of the death of a relative, and again he told his

mother the next morning. After what had happened with the Chihuahuas, it was hard for Ted to dismiss the second dream. And when, three weeks later, the family received a phone call announcing the relative's death, Ted became seriously concerned. So did Mrs. Rice, who insisted that he must quit having such dreams. Ted would gladly have obeyed her, but he was helpless to shut down the flow of images in his mind.

The most impressive of his prophetic dreams was the third one, and this time the details were sharp and clear. It began with a view of a dark, cloudy sky. Rain was falling, and the air was cold. He saw a rotunda in a large building, and in the center stood a casket draped with an American flag. In the dream, Ted approached the coffin, coming near enough to see a woman lying in it. He didn't recognize the woman, but he could tell that it was a solemn occasion, one of great importance.

When he awoke the next day, he described the dream to his family, yet none of them could see any significance in the details. Later, however, those details proved exact.

George Wallace had been the governor of Alabama since 1963, but by 1967 he had served all the time allowed by the state's constitution. It was a period of racial turmoil in the south, as in the rest of the country, and the political forces Governor Wallace represented were unwilling to give up control of the state. With no possibility of serving another term, he chose to put his wife Lurlene into the race for the governorship. She would certainly win, and through her he could continue to fight for the principles he held. And as history shows, that is exactly what happened.

But at the time of Ted's dream, no one had any idea that Lurlene Wallace would become governor of Alabama. His family did have a remote connection to the Wallace family, however, because Ted had become friends with a young man in Tuscaloosa who dated Governor Wallace's daughter for a while. It was exciting to be that close to the historical figure, especially since Wallace's stand against integration had propelled him into the national spotlight.

And when Lurlene Wallace won the governor's race and

moved into the public eye, everything the Wallaces did was reported on television. So, unfortunately, was the news that Mrs. Wallace had been diagnosed with cancer. Before her term as governor expired, Lurlene Wallace died in office, and Ted sat by the television with the rest of his family to watch her state funeral.

The sky that day was cloudy and rainy and cold. The TV camera zoomed in on the capitol building, showing the rotunda where an ornate casket stood. The American flag was draped over the coffin. The body of Mrs. Wallace was displayed for all to see. And the details of Ted's dream flooded back with shocking reality, playing out on the news just as he'd seen them many months before.

All those who had heard Ted's description of the funeral dream were now forced to see him in a new light. He was truly a stranger to them, in some way, and they weren't happy about the changes in the boy they had known. Psychic gifts were not welcome in the Rice family, they were not acceptable in his community, and they did not conform to the religious beliefs upon which they based their lives. No one was more disturbed than Ted. He was miserable in his recognition of the prophetic accuracy of his dreams. He didn't want to know about disasters and deaths, but the truth of his visions was obvious.

Although Ted had not been attending church at that time, after Lurlene Wallace's funeral his mental state was so unhappy that he tried to find comfort and answers in religion. He began praying fervently to have the burden of prophecy lifted from him. He started going to church with his family, hoping to free himself from what now clearly seemed to be an evil power. Jesus, he thought, was his only hope.

But in spite of his new religious motivations, Ted was still plagued by his powers of foreknowledge. When he bought a new car, for instance, something inside told him that he shouldn't let his father drive it, that something bad would happen if he did. But Mr. Rice insisted on borrowing the car shortly afterward and was injured in an accident. He had to be hospitalized, and Ted feared the worst, since his other dreams had predicted deaths that came true. Fortunately,

however, Mr. Rice's injuries were not severe, and for that Ted was grateful and relieved.

His depression continued, though, and out of concern Mrs. Rice suggested that Ted should talk to their minister for Christian counseling. Ted complied but found it very difficult to tell the minister about his dreams and intuitions. The man listened considerately, however, and Ted hoped for a helpful response. Instead, the minister concluded his parishioner must be suffering from mental problems.

At a loss for any other explanation, Ted visited a therapist. But he sensed that the man's primary concern was Ted's ability to pay for long-term treatment and didn't think he would find any help there. Besides, in every other facet of his life, there was no sign of mental impairment. Whatever his problems might be, Ted determined to deal with them himself.

He also decided to get into an independent position, by moving out of his parents' home. In Sun Valley he was accustomed to come and go as he wished, and now their parental restrictions chafed. Also, he felt their concern about his dreams and visions, as well as their disapproval. Whatever might be going on in his inner or external life, he didn't want his parents watching every move.

So with one of his buddies, Mike Stone, Ted moved into a two-bedroom apartment in the new Fountainbleu complex. Bachelor life was fun, and they never permitted each other to become bored, or boring. Between hosting their own parties and meeting the gang at the local hot spots, Ted and Mike were almost always on the go. Ted didn't have a steady girlfriend, which was ideal. There were plenty of attractive, interesting women at the university, and Ted dated as often as his job and schoolwork would allow. In the new apartment, enjoying himself with his friends, Ted felt that his life was proceeding smoothly again.

And to his great relief, the visionary dreams subsided. Months passed with no recurrence of the scenes of death or disaster that he had come to dread, and he felt that the worst was behind him.

But prophetic, disturbing dreams are only one aspect of

paranormal activities, and even though they ceased, Ted's life didn't resume a usual course. His relief was brief, shattered by something entirely new.

It began in the middle of the night, and this time Ted wasn't dreaming. Something made him wake up, and as he sat up in bed, Ted saw a dim glow of colored light moving into his room, right through the wall. The colors grew brighter and more distinct as he watched in wordless amazement. Then the purple and emerald glows coalesced into a definite shape.

At the foot of his bed stood a large black woman, and she was staring intently into his eyes. Dressed in an old-fashioned garment, the woman looked for all the world like Aunt Jemima, or a character from *Gone With the Wind*, except that this mammy's long gown shimmered with purple and green light.

Ted stared back in astonishment, and then the astonishment turned to utter fright. Before he could move, however, the woman began to communicate to him, although no words were spoken aloud.

"Please be calm," she told him telepathically. "I am not going to hurt you."

Still speechless, Ted drew himself up in the bed, never once taking his eyes from the glowing apparition. He reached out for the bedside lamp and flicked it on, hoping the image might disappear with the darkness. But instead he could see the woman even more distinctly. The whole situation was completely bizarre, but this apparition looked very, very real. He kept staring, studying every detail of the woman's appearance, and he noticed that a mist formed around her face, growing so dense that he couldn't see her hair clearly any more.

Ted eased slowly out of the bed and stood up, his back to the wall. He began to move, inching around the perimeter of the room towards the door. His only thought was to get away from whatever this thing might be and make his way to Mike, asleep in the other bedroom.

Aunt Jemima, however, was right beside the door. His only path out of the room would force him to pass close to

her. He paused, considering just how to accomplish this, when the woman once again spoke mentally to him as if reading his thoughts.

"Do not come too close," she said, and Ted understood these words as a warning of some danger. "Do not touch me, you must not touch me," she cautioned.

"No, ma'am, I sure won't!" he thought, still unable to make a sound. He certainly needed no warning. Touching this strange figure was the very last thing on his mind. Ted started inching forward again, determined to escape. And as he neared the doorway, he noticed that the woman glided back from him, keeping a steady distance.

It occurred to him then that the woman might be as afraid of him as he was of her. Emboldened by her shying away, Ted suddenly changed his mind and decided to touch her. He desperately wanted to know just how real the apparition really was. A few more inches, and the woman was within arm's length. But when he put out his hand toward her, she quickly turned around and disappeared back through the wall.

This little trick was more than Ted could handle. He dashed through the door and tore off down the hall, screaming, into the living room which was on the other side of the wall into which Aunt Jemima had vanished. He flipped on the light switch and looked around the room in fright, but it was empty.

Awakened by Ted's screams, Mike shot up out of the bed and hurried into the living room.

"Turn on all the lights!" Ted yelled, already running into the other rooms in the apartment and searching for the woman.

"What?" Mike called after him, bewildered. "What in God's name is going on here?"

Ted didn't bother to answer until he'd looked through every possible hiding place and assured himself that Aunt Jemima was no longer in the apartment. And then, smoking one cigarette after another, he calmed down enough to tell Mike what had just happened.

"It was a ghost," Ted kept saying, "the ghost of an old

black mammy."

"Sure," Mike replied, "sure, Ted. How many drinks have you had?"

"I'm not drunk! I was asleep, for pete's sake!" Ted argued. "And then I woke up and saw that woman, that ghost, whatever it was, come right through the wall! Man, I wish I did have a drink right now, though."

For the rest of the night, Ted kept Mike up talking, unable to get back to sleep. His nerves were ragged, and no matter how he tried to think about the event, he couldn't come up with a rational explanation. Mike questioned whether it might really have been a ghost, but they both knew that the apartment building was new and therefore not likely to be haunted by spirits from the past.

When they told Mike's girlfriend, Margie, about the nighttime visitor, she was instantly intrigued and set about trying to find a source for the spiritual intruder. She quizzed Ted, looking for any connections, and at last she learned that Ted and his mother had recently made a trip back to the old farm. While they were there, Mrs. Rice spotted an old black cooking pot which had been used out of doors, and she brought it back to Tuscaloosa as an antique.

"That must be it!" Margie said excitedly.

"What's it?" Ted asked.

"The connection, don't you see?" Margie explained. "That's the answer, it has to be. Your ghost must be the old black mammy who used to cook with that pot years ago. I bet she's unhappy that you all took the pot away from the farm. If you don't want another intrusion, Ted, you should get rid of that thing. Take it back to the farm."

Ted certainly didn't want a repeat performance. As soon as he could, he spoke to his mother and told her about the occurrence and Margie's theory that moving the pot away from the farmhouse had upset her and was to blame for the intrusion.

"I think she might be right," he concluded. "We better just take that old pot back to Grandma's farm."

"Have you lost your mind?" his mother asked incredulously. "Where is that psychiatrist's phone number? You

ought to get yourself right back to his office, Ted, and clear this whole thing up immediately."

"I don't need a shrink," Ted balked. "I just need to get rid of the pot!"

But Mrs. Rice was unimpressed. "Well," she finally said, "I tell you what. When that ghost shows up here and tells me to take it back, I might do it. But she hasn't been here yet or told me a blessed thing. So I'm keeping it."

And that was the end of the discussion. Reluctantly, Ted went back to the apartment, and for the next several nights he waited nervously for Aunt Jemima's return. But it didn't happen, and eventually he relaxed. Realizing that no harm had come from it, he was even able to laugh about the incident.

Besides, he consoled himself, at least the apparition had not brought a message of death or disaster the way his foreboding dreams had done. In fact, the entire incident seemed to have no real meaning at all, and he came to believe that his involvement was merely random or accidental. Maybe the black mammy was looking for someone else and had simply stumbled upon him instead. The ways of the spirit world were so unknown to him that this explanation made as much sense as any other.

Twelve

What beck'ning ghost, along the moonlight shade
Invites my steps, and points to yonder glade?
Pope

A few months later, Mike was unexpectedly offered a co-op job through the university. As a graduate student, he had much to gain from the position, but the one drawback was that he would have to relocate for six months, which meant giving up the apartment.

Ted was thrilled for his friend, but there was no way he could afford to keep the place alone. And the idea of moving back home was not at all to his liking. But he would worry about that later, he decided, and promptly suggested a night out with Mike to celebrate his good news.

They headed down to The Chucker, a local college hangout, and before long everyone there joined in the celebration. A while later when one of Mike's friends strolled in, he was invited over to the party table.

"You remember Ralph, don't you?" Mike asked Ted.

"I think so," he said, smiling up at a young man he'd met briefly a time or two before. "Ralph Miller, right?"

"Right," Ralph grinned back as he shook the hand Ted extended. "What's the occasion tonight?"

"A new job," Mike said. "Come on, grab a beer and sit. I won't be around much longer, so you better take advantage of my spending spree while you can."

Ralph joined them and soon heard all the details of Mike's upcoming move.

"So what are you going to do?" he asked Ted, "when Mike leaves? Y'all are roommates, aren't you?"

"Yeah," Ted nodded. "I haven't figured out where I'm going to go. The apartment is nice, but I can't afford it by myself. So I may have to move back home."

"Listen," Ralph said, "how about coming over to my house tomorrow? I've got an idea you might be interested in."

"What is it?" Ted asked.

"Oh, I'll save it for tomorrow," Ralph said. "Tonight's no good for talking. We've got a lot of beer to drink if we're gonna give Mike a real send-off."

Ted laughed and agreed by proposing another toast, but the next day he made a point of finding Ralph's house. As he drove up to the street number, he was surprised to see a large, turn-of-the-century home. It sprawled across beautifully landscaped grounds covered with azalea shrubs and graceful trees, now somewhat neglected, and when Ralph took him inside Ted was even more impressed by the great rooms, filled with nooks and crannies. Clearly, the house had been a showplace in its day, and he couldn't understand how a college student like Ralph could own such a wonderful home.

They talked for a while, and then finally Ted brought up Ralph's mysterious remark from the night before.

"What was it you wanted to see me about?" he asked. "What's the idea you mentioned at The Chucker?"

"Look," Ralph said, "how do you like this house?"

"Well, it's just great," Ted told him.

"Believe it or not," Ralph continued, "this place belongs to me. I inherited it. Actually, I was living here with the owner, Miss Flowers, who was an old friend of my family. And after a while, we got pretty close. She was like a godmother to me, I guess. See, she never married, and she sort of felt like I was her son or something. I lived here the past few years while working on my degree. Anyway, when she died last spring, she left this house to me."

"Real nice," Ted commented, looking around again.

"Sure is," Ralph agreed. "But unfortunately, Ted, as much as I love this place, it's got me a little spooked. I mean, I am uncomfortable here right now, I guess, and I just don't like

living in this big old house all alone.

"But I don't want to take just anybody in to live with me, you know, because the place is full of very valuable antiques. I know Mike real well, and he trusts you enough to be your roommate. And I've heard of your family. The Rice name is pretty well-known around here, and respected. I'm sure you're an okay guy, that's the point. So last night when I heard you were moving, I figured you might want to move in here. You can have the whole second floor, and I've got my bedroom and stuff down here."

"Are you sure?" Ted asked uncertainly.

"Yeah," Ralph replied, "I think it would be great. With other people in and out of the place, I don't think I'll be so aware of the quiet. I still miss Miss Flowers, too. But I've got to settle down and start concentrating on my studies more, if I'm ever going to finish this master's degree. What do you think?"

Ted took another look around the house, and after considering his nonexistent alternatives, he decided to accept Ralph's offer. They didn't know each other very well, but Ralph seemed likable and Ted was easy-going, and he didn't see any reason the arrangement wouldn't work. Before the weekend was over, he moved his things into the upstairs bedroom and settled in to enjoy the space and the privacy.

With their different schedules, Ted and Ralph didn't have much time at home together, but they became better acquainted and found they were really beginning to like one another. The house was large enough that they could entertain their friends without getting in each other's way, and it was seldom that Ted or Ralph ever went into the other's private space, and then only by invitation. Each kept to his separate part of the house, sharing only the kitchen and living room. Ted knew how careful Ralph was with all the treasures Miss Flowers had accumulated, and he did his best to be careful, too.

Not long after Ted moved into the rambling old house, however, things began to happen that were decidedly out of the ordinary. One day, for instance, when Ralph went upstairs looking for Ted, he went into the bedroom and

found a string of pearls on Ted's bed, curled neatly in a circle. The pearls had belonged to Miss Flowers, but they had been packed away for safekeeping after her death. Ralph was angry to think that Ted had been poking through things he should have left alone, and when Ted came home, Ralph confronted him.

"What were you doing with these?" he asked, showing Ted the necklace. "You're not supposed to get into Miss Flowers' things."

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Ted replied in surprise. He had never seen the pearls before.

"They were on your bed," Ralph said angrily. "And I don't appreciate you snooping around in things."

"Wait a minute!" Ted replied. "I don't know how those pearls got into my room, but I sure didn't put them there."

"Well, they didn't just get up and walk in there by themselves, did they?"

"How the hell would I know?" Ted answered, stung by this unexpected accusation. "I never saw them before! And I don't make a practice of messing with your things or with Miss Flowers' stuff, so you tell me. How could they get into my room?"

Ralph didn't know what to think. Ted's denial sounded genuine, but all he knew for sure was that he had packed the pearls away after his godmother's death, along with other of her belongings. If Ted hadn't taken the necklace to his room, Ralph couldn't explain finding it there.

The subject of the necklace was eventually dropped, but for the first time there was a feeling of doubt about Ted in Ralph's mind. And thereafter Ted was extremely careful to avoid any part of the house except his own quarters. He didn't like being mistrusted, but, like Ralph, he couldn't account for the strange incident.

The same thing happened a few weeks later. Another piece of jewelry turned up in a place where it shouldn't have been, and once again Ralph accused Ted of meddling in his personal things. Again Ted denied any involvement, and again the two men argued but came to no understanding about the situation. A third time occurred, and Ted was

beginning to wonder if Ralph wasn't trying to set him up for some reason, but both men were adamant they were guiltless. It just didn't make any sense. Ralph couldn't accuse Ted of theft–after all, the jewelry never left the house or disappeared–but their friendship was starting to deteriorate.

By early February, when several such incidents had happened, there was clearly a feeling of breached trust between the men. And neither of them would give an inch as far as their complicity in disturbing Miss Flowers' belongings was concerned. Ted realized that Ralph probably regretted having him as a roommate, but he didn't know what to do to reassure him that the incidents were as mysterious to him as they were to anyone else. They continued to share the house, but the atmosphere was decidedly cool.

When the early springtime weather turned unexpectedly warm, Ted noticed that the lawn and shrubbery were starting to bloom ahead of schedule. Ralph was too busy with his studies to take care of the lawn, so Ted decided one day to make a special gesture of friendship and do some work outdoors, cleaning and watering the grounds. Miss Flowers had obviously spent a lot of time to make them as lovely as the house, and Ted wanted to perpetuate that beauty.

Ralph came home, saw what Ted was doing, and immediately blew up in anger.

"What's going on?" he demanded. "Don't you realize that I'm on a very limited budget? I've barely got any pocket money left after I take care of the necessities of paying the utilities around here. You're just running up a big water bill!"

"Calm down," Ted said. "I'd be glad to pay more on the bills, if I'm not chipping in my share, Ralph. Man, I thought you'd be happy for me to work on the yard. Look at these plants. They're going to die if we don't water them. Don't you want to keep them in good shape?"

"No, the lawn doesn't matter," Ralph told him. "When I graduate, I've already made arrangements to sell this property to Miss Flowers' church. And they're going to tear the house down and build a new rectory, so the yard will be destroyed anyway. It doesn't matter if the azaleas die, so please don't run up the water bill any more, okay?"

"Okay," Ted agreed, "if that's the way you want it."

"That's the way I want it," Ralph confirmed.

A couple of mornings later, Ted's sleep was interrupted by Ralph complaining in a loud voice, on his way up the stairs to Ted's room.

"I can't believe you didn't listen to me!" he snapped. "Didn't I tell you to leave the lawn alone? I'm not made out of money, for God's sake!"

Ted sat up sleepily and stared at Ralph in confusion. "Slow down," he mumbled. "What are you talking about?"

"The sprinklers, that's what I'm talking about!" Ralph shouted. "They're on again, out in the yard, and I want to know why!"

Ted was astounded. "Look at me," he said, "I'm still in bed. I haven't even been downstairs yet, so how did I turn them on? By magic?"

"Well, if you didn't do it," Ralph asked suspiciously, "then who did?"

"God, I wish I knew," Ted told him with a growing sense of resentment. "Go yell at someone else, will you? I never touched the damn sprinkler."

For several days they didn't speak to one another, until the sprinkler was found turned on again. Another argument followed, and by then Ted was heartily sorry he had ever moved into the grand house.

The electric bill was the next thing to cause trouble, when Ralph came home and found several lights burning in empty rooms. He stormed at Ted again, warning him to quit running up the bill, but Ted stood his ground and refused to accept the blame for things he wasn't doing. Before long, the two men were ready to strangle each other, and neither of them could catch the other turning on the lights.

No matter how much they talked about these strange events, they simply couldn't come up with a sane explanation. At one point in another of their endless arguments, Ted broached the idea that maybe a ghost was to blame, but Ralph wouldn't consider such an absurd possibility.

"There's nothing like that going on here," he insisted. "These are physical events, not supernatural."

Ted finally wearied of the constant tension between them. He told Ralph that since things obviously weren't working out, he was going to move. He felt there was no other way to convince Ralph that he wasn't to blame for all the odd episodes with the sprinklers and the lights.

"I'll be out by the end of the month," he finished. "My folks have some apartments out back of their place, and I'll move into one of them."

Ralph accepted the news without complaint, and Ted could tell his roommate was relieved.

That night, after going to bed and sleeping for a few hours, Ted suddenly woke up, sensing that something was very wrong. He looked around in the darkened room and caught his breath in surprise when he made out the figure of a woman standing at the foot of his bed. As his eyes focused in the dark, he saw that she had short auburn hair. The woman was dressed in a black skirt and pink silk blouse, and around her neck was a very familiar string of pearls.

He sat up in bed, too frightened to move, and listened as the woman communicated telepathically. Although the conversation was fuzzy in his mind, he felt that the woman was thanking him for caring about the azaleas in the yard. She also indicated that she had wanted to show Ted her jewelry because she knew he would appreciate their beauty. When the conversation was over, the woman simply faded away into nothingness. Ted sat there a long time, speechless, wondering fearfully about the visitation, until in exhaustion he fell back asleep.

The next morning he was apprehensive about discussing the nighttime vision with Ralph. They were already on such bad terms that he was afraid to mention the figure he'd seen, knowing that Ralph rejected the idea of ghosts. But what else, Ted wondered, could the apparition have been?

Anxiety won out over caution, however, and Ted as casually as possible told his roommate about the woman in the bedroom.

Ralph listened very soberly, watching Ted's face as if trying to judge his truthfulness. At last he asked, "Do you know what she looked like?"

"Sure," Ted nodded. "Her hair was cut short, and it was sort of reddish-brown. She had on a black skirt and a pink blouse, silk, I think. And," he hesitated, "she was wearing pearls."

At first Ralph said nothing, and Ted regretted ever telling him about the incident. Then Ralph got up from the kitchen table and left the room. When he returned a few minutes later, he was carrying a photograph.

"Here," he said, handing over the picture.

Ted stared at it, at a woman with short auburn hair, a black skirt, pink blouse, and pearl necklace.

"Yeah," he said, "that's her."

"That's Miss Flowers," Ralph replied softly, but Ted could hear a new tone of belief in his voice. "And that's the only picture of her in the house."

"I swear to God," Ted said, "I've never seen this before."

"No, I didn't think so," Ralph told him. "It's been locked up in a chest in my room."

He sat back down, confused, but this time there were no accusations. The truth of the situation finally hit him, and whatever animosity he felt for Ted faded away.

That, at least, was a relief, but Ted was still set to move out as soon as the weekend came. Bickering for days with his friend was one thing, but a ghost was even more disturbing.

Two nights later, Miss Flowers was back. Once again, Ted sat in bed and listened as the apparition spoke to him mentally.

"I want you to help Ralph," she seemed to be saying. "If you don't stay here with him, he won't calm down, he won't be able to rest at night. Ralph needs to sleep well and start taking care of his studies, or else I'm afraid he won't finish his degree."

Ted nodded silently, knowing that the ghost was right. With all the anxiety Ralph had been experiencing, his grades had suffered, and he was on the verge of dropping out of the program.

"If you will stay on here," Miss Flowers continued, "until he finishes the degree in May, something that you've been needing for a very long time will be given to you."

In the utter strangeness of the situation, Ted lost control of his thoughts, and without stopping to consider anything, he mentally agreed to the woman's request. His bargain with the ghost was struck.

But Miss Flowers didn't stop at that. "You are going to become very sick, but you will recover. Do not worry about this illness, for you will be all right," she stressed reassuringly. "When this happens, you will go to the hospital and there you will recuperate. But when you are well enough to leave, you must not return to this house. That will force Ralph to go on with his life elsewhere."

All Ted could do was nod and answer mentally, "Yes, ma'am." And when the apparition disappeared and he could think independently again, the whole experience seemed somehow mystical, beautiful, and serene. He didn't fathom the mechanism behind the vision, yet it felt powerful, even godly. It never occurred to him to question whether angels could actually make bargains with humans.

The next morning, when he shared this new information with Ralph, neither of them knew what to think. A part of Ralph still tried to reject Ted's truthfulness, but he could no longer believe that his friend was lying. And that made him feel more shaky than before.

Ted told him he would honor his bargain with Miss Flowers and stay on in he house, and Ralph eagerly agreed. For the next few weeks, they waited with apprehension, wondering if the strange events would recur. But everything was normal, with no more incidents of water hoses or house lights turning on, or jewelry in improbable places, or even bedroom visitations. It was a sign to both men that the ghost was pleased with their arrangement, and so finally they began to relax.

Thirteen

Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream.
Shakespeare

The next month was more serene than at any previous time of Ted's residence with Ralph. Their friendship mended and they resumed their usual social lives happily. More importantly, Ralph was able to concentrate more deeply on his studies, and his grades showed rapid improvement. With no sign of the ghostly activities returning, they simply didn't talk about Miss Flowers, until one morning in the middle of March when Ted noticed that Ralph was in a depressed mood.

"What's wrong, buddy?" he asked. "You don't look too good."

"Oh, I'm okay, I guess," Ralph said. "It's just that today is the fifteenth."

"So?" Ted shrugged.

"It was a year ago today that Miss Flowers died," Ralph explained, "and that's got me down, you know. She was a very dear woman, really good to me. I've never lost anyone I loved so much before, and it's hard, thinking about her last days."

"I'm sorry," Ted said, without knowing what he could do to help. Ralph said nothing more, and they went on their separate ways for the day.

When they returned at dinnertime, Ralph seemed much better. They talked casually during the meal and then both got ready for dates. There was a party later that night, and both Ted and Ralph were looking forward to a good time.

Around ten p.m., Ted ran out of energy and returned home for the night. He went upstairs and undressed for bed, planning to read for a while. An hour or so later, Ralph also returned, and after talking briefly they both decided to call it a night.

Ted got back in bed and started reading again, but before too long he heard an odd noise downstairs which seemed to originate in the kitchen. It sounded like a radio turned on very loudly, picking up only static. After a few seconds the noise stopped suddenly, and Ted went back to his book. But he heard it again, a little louder. Once more it ceased, only to start up again, continuing the on-and-off cycle about every sixty seconds. Each time it returned, the crackly, wheezy noise was louder, and Ted could tell it was no longer in the kitchen. The sound was moving through the living room and slowly into the large central hallway.

By the time it reached the stairs, it was disturbingly powerful. Ted got out of bed and walked to his door, peering out.

"Ralph!" he shouted over the noise, "what the heck are you doing down there?"

Just then Ralph let out a yell and ran from his bedroom into the hall. As he came bolting up the stairs, Ted retreated into his room in fright, with no idea what was happening. He broke out in a cold, clammy sweat, trembling all over, unable to think or respond. Ralph ran into the room and dived wide-eyed onto Ted's bed.

"It's not me!" he screamed, "it's not me, it's not me! Do something, Ted, make it stop!"

"My God, Ralph, what is it?" Ted shouted back.

The sound was now filling the stairway, booming so loudly that the two men were deafened by the noise. The very walls shook with each explosion of sound, until the whole house seemed to be breathing, in and out, in and out, alive and monstrous. All Ted could think of was getting away from the threatening roar, but it was climbing relentlessly up the stairs toward his room, cutting off the escape route to the front door.

In sheer panic, Ted ran to his window and tore off the screen, determined not to stay in the room a second longer.

Ralph had the same idea at the same moment, and it was utter pandemonium as they both struggled to squeeze through the window in a mass of tangled arms and legs. At last Ralph climbed out onto the overhanging porch roof, and Ted was right behind him, tossing his trousers and shoes out the window. They slid off the roof in a rain of falling clothing, and Ralph took off running. Ted grabbed up his trousers and followed as fast as he could, tripping and stumbling as he tried to dress himself and run at the same time.

They didn't stop until they reached an all-night restaurant a few blocks away. Hurrying inside, Ralph and Ted took refuge in a well-lit booth, and there they sat, terrified, until dawn. For a while, all Ralph could do was moan and tremble, fearful and anguished.

This time, Ralph had no doubts. He knew that Ted wasn't responsible for the uproar, and he knew just as certainly what the noise was all about. This time, he had an explanation.

"When Miss Flowers was dying," he told Ted, "I went to see her every day in the hospital. She was in a coma those last few days, and her breathing was extremely labored and loud. I'd never been around anybody dying before. I listened to her struggle for breath, hour after hour, and I'll never forget how it sounded.

"That's what we heard tonight," he said miserably. "That was the sound of Miss Flowers as she died. It's called a death rattle."

Ted shuddered and said nothing. He had never been scared so completely, and as they walked slowly back to the house when the sun came up, he almost couldn't make himself go inside.

But Ralph begged him to stay. There was no way he could live there alone, not after such a night of terror, and finally Ted agreed. He had made a promise to Miss Flowers, after all, and now he was too frightened to break it, knowing the force the ghost could summon if it chose to do so.

For the rest of the semester, Ralph worked feverishly to complete his studies and earn the degree as his godmother had insisted to Ted. No more dates, no more anything until his work was done. And his efforts paid off, improving his

grades enough to make the passing list. He and Ted wanted to be sure they would do nothing to set off Miss Flowers again.

By the time April rolled around, conditions at the house were generally back to normal. Ralph was no longer so unsettled, and he and Ted were finally sleeping well. Knowing that he was fulfilling his godmother's wishes gave him an inner peace and strength.

Ted, however soon began going downhill. At first he was merely tired, and then he became continuously weak. One evening when he came home from work, his stomach was so upset that he suddenly fell into a fit of vomiting, and everything he'd eaten that day was lost.

For the next week, each day was the same. He woke up exhausted, struggled through work, tried to eat, and then threw up at night. In this state of constant physical upheaval, Ted lost weight rapidly, unable to keep anything down, and his fatigue was overwhelming. No longer able to function on the job, at last he went to the doctor.

A series of tests were ordered as the doctor tried to determine the problem, but the results were all negative. He gave Ted some medicine for nausea and sent him home with instructions to come back if the situation didn't improve. But if anything, the problem grew worse. Ted tried to keep up with his work, yet suffering from continual nausea and exhaustion, he could not carry on with the job.

Everything came to a head one morning as Ted sat dispiritedly at his desk, unable to concentrate. He felt a sudden wave of dizziness overtake him and fought to get out of his chair. The next thing he was aware of was being in the hospital emergency room, surrounded by medical personnel, with an IV stuck into his arm. There was no memory of fainting or of the ambulance ride to the hospital. In a fog he listened as the doctor ordered him admitted immediately for more tests.

During the next three days, Ted underwent an exhaustive battery of procedures. As he sat visiting with his parents on the third evening in the hospital, the doctor finally came in to discuss the test results.

"We don't know what's wrong with Ted," he told Mr. and

Mrs. Rice apologetically. "I don't want to be an alarmist, but there are a lot of symptoms here which make me suspect the possibility of cancer. But I really don't know yet. The only way we can be certain is to do exploratory surgery, a biopsy. And I need your consent to do it."

Stunned by this news, Ted tried to discuss all the possibilities with his parents, and although no one wanted him to undergo surgery, his condition didn't seem to leave them any option. Reluctantly he agreed to the procedure, and the doctor scheduled it for early the next morning.

After his parents left, Ted lay in bed feeling very alone and frightened. He thought about the doctor's fears of cancer, and he tried to accept the idea that he could be facing a terminal situation. All his hopes for the future ran through his mind, like a movie of lost possibilities. The nurse brought in medication to sedate him, and as he drifted fitfully into sleep, Ted suddenly thought of Maya and Sun Valley. Her image seemed to hang in the air before him, and her smile, so comforting and confident, was the last thing he remembered that night.

At seven a.m. the next morning, the doctor and two orderlies came into Ted's room, rousing him only slightly from a hazy awareness. The doctor flipped on the light and then froze in the doorway, staring wordlessly at Ted.

He waved the orderlies back out of the room and told Ted, as calmly as possible, "Don't move. Don't get out of the bed. I'll have somebody in here very shortly with a bedpan if you need one, but whatever you do, don't move."

The doctor backed out of the room and shut the door. Half an hour later, he returned with the orderlies, but this time they were wearing surgical masks and gloves. He examined Ted thoroughly and then called for the lab to send a technician. Blood samples were drawn and carted away, and Ted was ordered to stay in bed. He tried to get an explanation from the doctor, but his questions were ignored.

It was a couple of hours later–long, worrisome hours for Ted–before the doctor reappeared.

"We've got the results back," he told Ted, "and I just can't figure this out. You have hepatitis, Ted. The moment I came

in this morning and saw that your skin had turned a bright golden-yellow, I knew what it was.

"But what I don't understand is that we've already done three tests for hepatitis, and the results all came back negative these past three days. That just shouldn't have happened. At least we now know what's wrong with you. While we treat you, you'll have to be kept in isolation upstairs, and you'll need total bed rest for at least a month. If everything goes okay, we'll talk about sending you home after that."

And so began a long, slow process of treatment during which time Ted was effectively locked away from direct contact with the world. Visitors had to speak to him through a protective shield, and only briefly at first until Ted's strength began to return. Ralph came for frequent visits and told Ted that he'd arranged for his girlfriend to stay in the house at night so he wouldn't be alone.

"There are only two more weeks left in the semester, anyway," Ralph explained, "and she's agreed to stay over until my exams are finished."

The month of recuperation finally passed, and Ted was improved enough to go to his parents' home for three more months of recovery. Ralph was one of his first visitors there, telling Ted that at last he had completed his master's degree.

"So I've got all that behind me now," he smiled, "and I'm ready for whatever is next. The only thing I'm wondering about now, my friend, is when you'll be able to move back to the house. You're looking pretty good now, so what do you think? I've got your old room ready any time you decide to come back. You've really been missed, buddy."

"I don't know," Ted hesitated. "Do you think that's such a good idea?"

"Sure," Ralph said. "I really want you to come back. My girlfriend was great to stay with me and keep me from going crazy, but she just can't do it any more. Besides, like I said, I've missed you. Everybody has. But I told them, no wild welcome-home parties until you're one hundred percent again. Then we'll get back to the fun, what do you say?"

"Don't you remember what Miss Flowers told me?" Ted reminded his friend. "She said that I was not to move back in

with you after my illness."

"Yes, I remember," Ralph nodded, "but, heck, I'm not even sure I believe all that stuff really happened now."

Ted looked at him questioningly, and Ralph shrugged.

"Well," he finally said, "if you're not going to come back, I doubt that I'll continue to stay there, then. It just isn't any fun living in a place like that by yourself. A place like Miss Flowers' home needs laughter, and fun. Guess I'll just go over to Atlanta and visit some friends for a while, and we'll talk again when I get back. I'd really like for you to move back, though. I could start on the doctoral program. Anyway, don't forget, it's inexpensive to live there, and you won't want to stay with your folks forever. I wish you'd reconsider it, Ted."

"But Miss Flowers was right about me getting sick," Ted argued, "and after what we went through that night, the anniversary of her death, I don't think we'd better cross her."

"Do you really believe what she said?" Ralph asked. "Don't you think it might all have been just some hallucination or something?"

"I don't know," Ted replied. "We'll just have to see when you get back."

Ralph gave up for the moment and left Ted to rest. He went to Atlanta for the next month, and when he returned he had surprising news.

"You're not going to believe this," he said. "While I was in Atlanta, I reconnected with an old girlfriend who's just coming out of a divorce, and we really hit it off great. She wants us to get back together, and I've decided to take her up on that. I'm going to stay in Atlanta. I've already got a job, a really good job. So all I have to do now is contact the people at Miss Flowers' church and tell them I'm ready to sell the house."

"Congratulations!" Ted grinned. "Everything worked out, didn't it? And Miss Flowers was right, after all. She said you needed to get on with your life, and it looks like that's what you're doing. Guess she knew what she was talking about, huh?"

"Yeah," Ralph agreed, "I guess so. Who would have

thought it?"

"Right," Ted echoed, "who would have?"

He was happy for Ralph, but he couldn't help wondering how he was going to get his own life back on track. And he fervently hoped that he had seen the last of any ghosts. His encounters with the Aunt Jemima apparition and with the spirit of Miss Flowers, despite what ever mysterious purpose they were meant to serve, had at least accomplished two things. Now Ted knew that the spirit world was real, in some unfathomable way, and that intimate knowledge made him apprehensive and uneasy.

Fourteen

...led by some wondrous power, I am fated to journey
hand in hand with my strange heroes
Gogol

By the end of the summer, Ted was back in good health. He contacted his boss, but to his dismay he learned that another employee had taken over the job in his long absence. He knew the company was obligated to rehire him, yet there was no room for him now in the Tuscaloosa office.

Instead he was offered a position a hundred miles away in Gadsden. Depressed by the prospect of moving so far from his home and friends, Ted accepted the offer anyway, determined to make the best of the situation. He needed to work, to recover financially from months of unemployment, and he hoped that life in Gadsden wouldn't be too lonely.

His good intentions soon evaporated, however, once he moved into a small apartment in the dingy industrial town. He didn't know anyone there, and his depression deepened. Ted's only breaks from the monotony of his routine were visits to Tuscaloosa, which he made almost every weekend. And every Sunday as he drove back into Gadsden, his spirits sank again.

On one of these trips home, when nothing special was planned, Ted decided to drop in at The Chucker, the college bar he used to haunt. The Chucker, for all its local notoriety, was little more than an alleyway, enclosed at both ends, with a roof. Dilapidated tables and chairs littered the floor, it was cold in the winter and steamy in the summer, and cockroaches considered it their homeland. In other words, The Chucker was a favorite spot for students to gather and get

rowdy, and Ted was in need of a good dose of laughter.

Ralph and Ted had been regulars at The Chucker up until the time of Ted's illness, which in fact had led to one of those incidents for which the place was famous. After Ted's hepatitis was diagnosed and he was hospitalized, Ralph informed the bar's patrons that they had all been exposed to the highly contagious disease. They loudly complained about the gamma globulin injections they would have to receive, none more loudly than Dr. Eugene Thorn, a professor at the university.

He railed at the absent Ted for a while, and then he railed at the doctors, nurses, and medicine in general, declaring he would never go to the hospital. But the gang at The Chucker loaded him up with them and took off, with Dr. Thorn protesting the entire way.

When they arrived, the others insisted that the good professor should be first, if only to shut him up, so he was escorted into the exam room by a nurse who told him to drop his shorts and bend over the table. While she was preparing the hypodermic, a doctor suddenly threw open the door, and Dr. Thorn, fully exposed, mooned the crowd in the waiting room. This display was met with resounding applause, and thereafter Dr. Thorn's invectives against Ted turned threatening.

"He's had it!" the professor roared, "and I'm going to give it to him! When Ted Rice recovers, he's mine. He's cost me twenty dollars for this damned shot, and he's made me show my ass to everyone in town!"

And the story grew more outrageous and embellished every time it was recounted down at The Chucker. So when Ted showed up that Saturday night, he was a renowned figure. He walked in the door, and all the action and noise stopped as the crowd stared at him in ominous silence. At a far table, someone suddenly jumped up and pointed in alarm at Ted, yelling, "Run, everybody, it's Typhoid Teddy!"

The place exploded in laughter, and Ted made his way over to Dr. Thorn's table, ordered a beer, and sat down, looking around at the crowd. It was a typical mix of ditch diggers and students, CPAs and professors, coeds and a couple of

surreptitious hookers, and plenty of Ted's old buddies. A few black faces stood out in the crowd, and the Hippies added a touch of eccentric color to the mix. Even Regina Cook, a notorious ex-ballerina now weighing in at three hundred pounds, showed up for a one-time performance on roller skates.

The doors flew open, and there stood Regina, resplendent in an oversized tutu. She leapt into a swan dive arabesque and wheeled off through the crowd, scattering chairs and patrons as Dr. Thorn yelled out, "Gangway! Regina's rolling!"

The screams eventually subsided, and things returned to order, aside from two fights that everyone else ignored until the boxers gave up and ordered another round together. It was a boisterous night at The Chucker, and before the customers knew it, midnight sneaked up on them and they were ordered out.

But the revelers weren't ready to call it a night. Someone shouted, "Hey, there's a party over at Joe's house! You all follow me!"

And the people responded, spilling out of The Chucker and into a caravan of cars rolling off down the street.

"Well, you're not going to turn into a pumpkin at the stroke of midnight," Dr. Thorn told Ted. "So come on, you're going, too. You're the only one who's sober, you've got to drive."

And Ted found himself shanghaied off with a crew of crazies piling into his car. All the passengers, who had been drinking to excess, shouted directions incoherently, with Dr. Thorn thundering loud above everyone else. Soon Ted pulled into the correct driveway and followed the crowd into the party, which had been underway for hours. People crammed into every room, and by this time of night they were a very friendly crowd.

Ted wandered through the large old house, waving and talking and listening to music that was unlike any he'd ever heard, full of strange rhythms and strange instruments.

Sometime later, he came across a small group gathered around a low table in one room, and Ted didn't recognize the

contraption that stood in the center of the table. It looked like a metallic octopus, with tubed tendrils coming out from a central urn-shaped device. The people in the room were smiling but unusually quiet, and every so often Ted watched one of them pick up a tube and inhale deeply from its tip. He wondered what they were doing, but he didn't ask any questions, not wanting to appear ignorant.

Ted truly had no clue to these activities, having never been exposed to such things, including marijuana, but when one of his acquaintances waved him over and said, "Why don't you have a hit?" Ted joined in. He took the tube, put it to his mouth, and filled his lungs in a deep inhalation. He sat there a few moments, waiting expectantly, but nothing happened.

The atmosphere was so happy and loving, though, that Ted sat back to enjoy it all. The others apparently were feeling no pain, and Ted decided that he just hadn't done it properly. Trying again, Ted drew on the hookah again, sucking like a Hoover. And again, he couldn't tell any difference.

The people with him, however, noticed a definite change. Ted was deep in conversation with someone, and then, in the middle of a sentence, his face suddenly froze in a strange grin. Twenty minutes later, Ted still hadn't finished the sentence. Finally his friend gently propped Ted back against the wall and wandered away.

"Who's that guy with the perpetual grin?" Ted heard someone ask later, but he was too far gone to respond. The daze continued, and sometime after three in the morning, Ted felt himself being lifted from the floor and maneuvered outside. The party was over, he was told, and it was time to go home.

First, however, he had to find his car, a huge Buick he had borrowed from his father. With the help of his friends, Ted's car was located and he was crammed inside. His family's home was only a few blocks away, but Ted was having a problem with his vision. His perspective was all wrong, and so was his sense of motion. Even walking seemed to be done at a breakneck speed.

When he started up the car, it was impossible for him to

control the machine. Even the slightest, delicate touch of his foot to the gas pedal made the car shoot forward in a blur of speed. So like a good defensive driver, he kept one foot on the brake as he tapped the gas with the other. Fearfully he backed up and headed for the street, but every time he pumped the gas the car would explode out from under him. He couldn't understand why the speedometer read only five miles per hour when he was certain he must be breaking the speed limit.

Working his way out the driveway and down the street, Ted paid very close attention to his steering. He passed by large, old homes on spacious lots, wending his way home, and just ahead he saw the street onto which he needed to turn. He circled the steering wheel and gunned the engine, only to find himself heading straight up a private driveway in a head-on collision course with the garage at its end. He had mistaken the residence drive for his street, but it was too late to stop. The mighty Buick had broken free and was stampeding.

"Oh, my God!" he screamed, swerving away at the last possible moment. Without wavering, Ted steered the car toward the curb, rolling unceremoniously over the lawn, and directly into a concrete birdbath. He felt the impact and heard the scraping knocks of debris under the chassis as the car careened onward. Unfortunately, a row of doomed azaleas lay in his path, and they too were mowed down as he headed for the street, leaving a trail of mangled shrubbery and chunks of cement behind him.

"Whew! That wasn't too bad! They probably won't even notice," he thought, congratulating himself on the narrow escape. "Thank God I didn't plow into that garage and do any damage!"

The street he wanted was just ahead, and Ted was so pleased with himself that he failed to notice the large array of lawn furniture standing between him and his goal. The Buick rolled on, and aluminum chairs crumpled, crunching loudly beneath its wheels, but Ted didn't care. He'd done it! He'd made it to the street, and he was still alive, that was all that mattered!

"All right," he sighed, "it's easy sailing now. Only a couple more blocks."

Ted bumped down the curb and into the street, weaving along in the center so he wouldn't hit anything else. A grating, scraping noise followed after him, but Ted was too focused on his goal to notice. Everything in his smoke-clouded mind was riveted on home, now just a few houses away.

Something flashed in the rearview mirror, and Ted looked up to see the rotating lights atop a patrol car, moving in his direction.

"Uh-oh," he thought, pulling over slowly to the curb, "gotta be cool. Don't want him to get suspicious."

The patrol car parked behind him, and the officer sauntered over to the driver's side of the Buick, shaking his head. He peered into the window at Ted's grinning face and asked, "What do you think you're doing?"

Ted gave a sigh of relief when he recognized the officer, whom he'd met a few times at The Chucker.

"Oh, just coming home," he replied, giggling.

"Do you know that you've left a trail of lawn furniture scattered behind you for the last three blocks?" the officer asked. "And that you're pulling a chaise lounge on your rear bumper?"

Confused by this surprising news, Ted leaned out the window and gazed back at the carnage in horror.

"Oh, my God!" he gasped. "Forget about the lawn furniture, man! I'm worried about the people who were sitting in 'em!"

Terrified, he waited to be dragged off to jail, but the officer, who knew from personal experience what could happen to someone after a night at The Chucker, didn't arrest him. And Ted, who had learned his lesson from the marijuana octopus, decided that maybe he should just stick to beer.

Most weekends, however, were boring and lonely, especially when Ted's car developed problems and he couldn't leave Gadsden. A few months after relocating, though, he got a surprise phone call from Ralph.

"Donna and I want to see you," Ralph said cheerily.

"Why don't you come on over this weekend for a visit? It's only a two-hour drive to Atlanta. We'll have a great time."

"I'd really love to see you both again," Ted said, "but I can't make it. My car's worn out, and it's in the shop."

"No problem," Ralph insisted. "Southern Airlines has a special price on fares right now. It's dirt cheap to fly into Atlanta. Why don't you just catch a plane? We'll meet you at the airport, and then I'll show you all over Atlanta. You'll love it."

The prospect of another dreary weekend in Gadsden was more than Ted could bear, so he agreed and made reservations right away. On Friday after work he went straight to the airport and boarded for his trip.

The man seated next to him was very friendly and struck up a conversation to pass the time. As they talked, Ted was surprised to discover that the man was acquainted with his sister, having worked with her years before at a bank. The man was now president of a new bank in Atlanta, and he and Ted had a friendly visit for the rest of the flight.

"By the way," the man said as they parted at the airport, "if you ever think you'd like to move to Atlanta, Ted, come see me at the bank. We'll be doing a lot of expansion in this area. Since you've got experience in finance, we might be able to use you."

"Thanks, thanks a lot," Ted said, shaking the man's hand. "That's really nice of you."

Ralph and Donna were waiting outside and greeted Ted warmly. The next two days were a whirl of visiting and sightseeing as his friends toured him around the city. For the first time since moving to Gadsden, Ted was having fun, and that made his return to the lonely apartment all the more depressing.

He thought about the affable man he'd met on the plane, and the offer of a job was seriously attractive. Ralph encouraged him to pursue the offer, and the two of them decided that it would be a way for Ted to get out of Alabama and away from the weird and frightening psychic phenomena he'd known there. Telling himself not to expect too much, he contacted the bank president and asked for an appointment

for an interview.

He was invited back to Atlanta, and after an entire day of touring the bank and meeting various employees, Ted received the offer of a position. It didn't take him two seconds to accept, and when he returned to Gadsden he gave notice and prepared to move. Two weeks later, Ted had found a new apartment in Atlanta and was busy learning about his new job.

His first assignment was in the credit card department, working with a woman named Harriett Wallace. They quickly became friends, and Ted found that she was easy to talk with and a real help in accustoming him to his new surroundings. In fact, everything about his life in Atlanta developed so smoothly that he knew he'd made the right decision in relocating there.

One afternoon, as he sat working at his desk, Harriett leaned over and said in a whisper, "Hey, Ted, do you believe in ghosts?"

His eyebrows raised apprehensively as he thought back to the night of terror in Miss Flowers' home.

"Why did you ask me that?" he wondered.

"My friend Julia has a friend named Marie Jackson," Harriett explained, "and she just told me they're starting some ghost classes."

"Ghost classes?" Ted repeated. "What on earth is that?"

"It's psychic development studies," Harriett said. "They teach you how to communicate with spirits. My friend wants me to come along and participate, but I really don't want to go by myself. I thought maybe you'd go with me."

"Huh-uh, no way," Ted shook his head. "I don't want any part of that! No, ma'am, I don't want to talk to ghosts!"

Harriett looked at him in surprise. "What is it?" she asked, "what's happened that you're not telling me?"

"Honey," he laughed nervously, "you really wouldn't believe me if I told you."

But Harriett refused to be put off, and finally Ted relented enough to tell her a little about the experience with Ralph in Tuscaloosa.

"If you'd been through that ordeal," he concluded, "you

wouldn't want anything to do with ghosts, either. So just let it drop, please, Harriett, and don't ask me to go to those classes, okay?"

"Okay, sure," she conceded, and for a while nothing else was mentioned. Still, she and Ted grew closer through the following months, talking frequently on the phone in the evenings and sharing the complaints and gossip from work.

One night after they had been conversing for a while, Harriett once again brought up the psychic development classes, asking Ted to reconsider and go to a meeting.

"If only you knew how all that stuff still upsets me to think about it," he said in irritation, "you wouldn't keep harping on it! Harriett, you just don't understand. I moved all the way from Alabama to get away from that business, and now you're trying to bring it back into my life. Besides, maybe the Baptists are right. Maybe it's all the work of the devil. It's something I just don't want to deal with, so if you're really my friend, you'll drop it now!"

"All right, I'm sorry," Harriett apologized. "But I've got to tell you something else, and then I won't bring it up again. I've talked about you a couple of times with Julia, Ted, and to Marie, too. Marie asked me what you look like, and when I told her she insisted that she had to meet you as soon as possible. I don't know why, but at least I promised to try to get you two together."

"Well, please don't!" Ted replied emphatically. "I don't want to talk to them or meet them or have anything to do with them."

As soon as he spoke those words into the phone, Ted looked up and saw that a drinking glass, which had been on the kitchen counter, was rising up into the air as if lifted by invisible hands. His mouth dropped open in shock. Then the glass suddenly dropped and crashed into he sink, shattering into hundreds of small fragments.

"What was that?" Harriett asked, hearing the noise in the background.

"For God's sake, get over here!" Ted shouted, dropping the receiver. He ran from the kitchen in terror and out to the parking lot, afraid to go back inside alone.

Minutes later, Harriett arrived. She saw that Ted was pale and shaking uncontrollably. He took her into the apartment and showed her the shattered glass in the sink. When he told her what had happened, Harriett became as nervous as Ted.

"Now do you see why I didn't want to talk about ghosts? he said. "The spooky things that went on the past were just too much for me. I don't want those spirits anywhere near me! And then you started talking about it again, and look what happened. You're going to cause me to have a nervous breakdown if you don't leave me alone. And if those women bug you again about wanting to meet me, you just tell them I've moved out of town!"

"Sure, Ted, just calm down," Harriett said. "I won't ever mention it again, I swear."

They cleaned up the splinters of broken glass and talked a while longer, until Harriett was certain that Ted had regained his composure. But when she left, Ted decided he wouldn't stay in that apartment a minute longer than necessary. Within weeks, he found a new place to live and once again moved, hoping to leave the eerie influences behind him.

His new home was an upper-floor apartment in a beautiful complex miles away from the first location. It overlooked a small lake and a stand of trees, all of which he found very soothing. Walking through the woods again, Ted was reminded of his days in Sun Valley and the comforting effects he had felt in the natural surroundings. He determined to put memories of all the strange events completely out of his mind, especially the shattered glass. And he was thankful that Harriett, true to her word, didn't mention ghosts or the psychic classes again.

A few days after settling into the new apartment, Ted was enjoying a quiet evening alone when the doorbell rang unexpectedly. He opened the door and saw two women standing there, one of whom was holding a Bible.

"Great," Ted groaned inwardly, "Jehovah's Witnesses. How the hell do I get rid of them?"

"Hello," the first woman said, but Ted interrupted quickly.

"I'm not interested," he told her, starting to shut the door.

The woman, however, stuck her foot in the way and began inching into the room, ignoring Ted's words. He backed up helplessly, unable to react rudely to the women, who were talking their way through the door. Besides, he could tell by the looks on their faces that they wouldn't take no for an answer. So he relented and ushered them inside, expecting to spend the rest of the evening bombarded by warnings of hellfire and damnation. But the first words the woman spoke blew away his expectations.

"I'm Julia Black," the woman said, "Harriett's friend. And this is Marie Jackson."

"I'm going to kill Harriett," Ted thought miserably, "and they'll have to bury her tomorrow."

But aloud he was a gentleman and offered the women seats in the living room. He took a position as far across the room as possible, in a chair beside the fire escape window. If glasses started floating and crashing again, or anything else spooky occurred, he wanted a quick exit route, and the women could deal with the ghosts without him.

Marie looked squarely at Ted and began to tell him about her psychic development class, pinning him down with her relentless stare. She was doing this work, she explained, under the auspices of the National Spiritualists Association, and she assured him that her work was all done through God.

"I'd really like for you to come over and participate," she said. "We very much want you in our group."

"Excuse me, ma'am, but why?" he asked. "Harriett told me about this a while back, that you were interested in me. But I don't understand any of this. I told her to keep you away from me. Why is it so important that I come and be part of your study group?"

Marie and Julia hesitated a moment, looking at each other mysteriously. "Why don't you tell him, Julia?" Marie finally said.

Julia nodded and opened the Bible she'd been holding, to reveal a sheet of paper stuck in its pages.

"A little over a year ago," she began–and Ted immediately counted back in his mind, realizing that would have

been around the same time he saw the glowing Aunt Jemima in his bedroom–"in our meditation with the group one evening I got an image of a short man with balding, light brown hair. I didn't recognize this man, but I was given a message that he would be coming in the future and that it was of the utmost importance to bring him into our group. The message said that without this man's involvement, our group would not survive."

Ted listened without interrupting, keeping an eye on the fire escape and wondering how quickly he could get out the window and away from these crazy women.

"The initials that were given to me," Julia continued, "were T.R. When Harriett started talking about you, and I found out your name, I asked her to describe you. Ted, her description exactly matched the image of the man I'd been shown, and now that I see you, I know for certain that you're the one we've been waiting for. I begged Harriett to bring you to the class, but you kept refusing. And since you wouldn't come to us, I just had to come for you myself."

When Julia had started this explanation, Ted immediately felt uncomfortable. The episode of the shattered glass had set off all his old fears, and he wanted to be completely free of all things paranormal. But as Julia continued to talk, and to explain how her information had pointed directly to him, he slowly began to feel a comforting essence coming from the two women, in spite of the strange things they were telling him.

Everything he'd been through in the past had only served to frighten and drive him away from the world of spirits. But Marie and Julia gave him an altogether different feeling, and he sensed that whatever they were involved in, it couldn't be so terrible, since they were obviously gentle and sincerely good people.

He listened attentively to the ladies for over an hour, and for the first time allowed himself to feel a curiosity about psychic phenomena, untinged by fear, and to acknowledge the wonder his past experiences had evoked. Finally when they finished speaking, Ted found that he wasn't fighting the force that was drawing him into areas he had resisted for so long.

His fears had turned to curiosity.

"All right, I'll try it," he whispered, amazed by the words even as he said them.

The two women smiled and nodded. Somewhere deep within himself he felt that his involvement was inevitable. The next time Marie's group held a meeting, Ted was there. He knew that a momentous corner had been turned, but he had no idea where the spirits would ultimately lead him.

Fifteen

It sounds like stories from the land of spirits
If any man obtain that which he merits,
Or any merit that which he obtains.
Coleridge

Under Marie's guidance, Ted began training to work as a psychic, or a medium, as the National Spiritual Association of Churches defined the phenomenon. According to their statement, "A Medium is one whose organism is sensitive to vibrations from the spirit world and through whose instrumentality intelligences in that world are able to convey messages and produce the phenomenon of Spiritualism."

This certainly seemed to describe Ted's abilities. His experiences with the mammy apparition and more especially with the ghost of Miss Flowers showed that his sensitivity opened him to spirit communications. Beginning, then, in late 1970 he studied Spiritualist teachings. Marie tutored him in the movement's history and development as well as the church's philosophy, none of which he'd heard before. An entirely new world of the metaphysical was his to explore, and Ted was a star pupil.

After his initial study, Ted and several others in the group started actual training sessions. As part of each meeting, they spent at least an hour learning how to meditate and how to recognize and share the messages that were received in this manner.

The group usually consisted of twenty or so members, and in the practice sessions everyone had an opportunity to pass along psychic communications to someone else in the group. When Ted's turn came, he found that, just as he'd

done with the photos in Maya's album, he had no trouble at all receiving apparently psychic material in his meditations. His method was similar, too: he studied the face of each member and then was able to make statements about each one.

The accuracy of his statements convinced Marie that Ted was indeed the man whose coming had been predicted. Clearly he belonged in the group and had strong psychic talents which were already quite active. Even in his early phase of training, Ted was able to do things that Marie could do only after she'd been through long and vigorous training. She realized that his gift was exceptionally powerful.

But there were other things she could teach him. A medium needed to know the best way to refine the incoming messages and deliver them without causing any offense or harm to the person for whom they were intended. Marie's expertise in this area was invaluable to Ted. She taught him to keep any highly personal material to himself until it could be communicated in private and thus avoid embarrassing the recipient. And she taught him never to read someone without the person's permission, for such readings constituted an invasion of privacy just as much as listening in on phone calls or intimate conversations would be.

Furthermore, Ted had to be shown how to interpret the content of psychic messages which were often delivered in vague signals or symbols. If he saw dark clouds gathering above a subject, for instance, he learned to recognize what such symbols might mean: there was going to be 'rain on the parade.' There was a whole psychic language of symbols to be learned, and Marie was able to teach him about such things.

Ted learned quickly. Before long, Marie had him up performing before large crowds, reading many people in the audience with ease and finesse. One after the other, the individuals Ted selected received messages that flooded into his mind as he concentrated on the person's face. The accuracy of his readings was soon widely known. And when he'd mastered that level of his education and performance, the study sessions intensified. With amazing speed, he conquered each

lesson and was shortly working through the material that would prepare him to be licensed as a medium by the National Spiritualists Association.

When Marie felt that he was ready, they traveled together to the Association headquarters in Cassadaga, Florida. Part of the licensing process required Ted to speak before the board members and also to deliver psychic messages to a large audience. This allowed the board to assess his competence as a medium. He also took six hours of required written tests, covering the Association's history and development, and he passed with a practically flawless performance.

Ted received a license from the group, and with that in hand he and Marie were able to appeal for a charter, which was readily granted. After obtaining approval from Georgia officials, they then started the first Spiritualist church in the state. By that time, there was a sizable group in the Atlanta area interested in psychic work, and the new congregation flourished.

Ted had come quite a distance from his first fear and reluctance to deal with the paranormal. He was gratified by his association with other people who understood his talent and appreciated the work he could do. He found that it was great fun to work with other psychics in the training sessions, sharing a common vision and language and supporting one another's efforts.

Sometimes he did see visions or receive information that disturbed, and there were frequently messages that saddened him, just has he had been moved by the dreams of deaths and disasters he'd had in Tuscaloosa.

But he also got messages that elated him and the people for whom they were intended. Occasionally he foresaw serious illnesses, for example, and was able to alert his clients to seek medical help that proved to be life-saving. He was shown new job possibilities that often led to more rewarding careers, and many times he assured people about their future romantic happiness, relaying these communications from the spirits with a rewarding sense of accomplishment as he watched the visions come true. Such happy predictions occurred time and again, all of which convinced him that his

work was important.

As Marie had taught him, Ted came to see that in psychic work one had to accept the sad messages just as completely as the happy ones. Both the positive and negative would come to the open psychic mind, and there was no choice but to deal with this material and to maintain an even balance. Ted had found the existence of the spirit world, from which such material originated, and he felt that it was a benevolent source stemming from a loving, caring God.

By getting in touch with his spirit guides and delivering their communications, Ted believed he was helping this unseen world. Its efforts, he learned through his studies, were to teach humanity that death is not the end of existence, that there is truly an afterlife, and that God is in charge of it all.

Ted had several spirit guides who worked through him. One was known as Raphael, who claimed to be a Spanish entity. Another much more vivacious and entertaining guide was the spirit of a young girl named Sharon. In life, she had been a dear friend of Ted's, but she died at age sixteen. In her spirit form, Sharon was a delight and an entertainer, just as Ted had known her to be in life, and it was proof to him that the individual continued on after the death of the earthly body.

During this training time, Ted discussed with the others his visitation from the Aunt Jemima figure. He gave a detailed account of the event, including the vivid, almost three-dimensional purple and emerald outfit she wore. None of his colleagues, however, were able to get a clear message about her purpose in coming to Ted. But they reasoned that since Ted had grown up in the backwoods farm country of Alabama, the black mammy must have been a spirit associated with his grandmother's farm. Perhaps, they thought, she had come to him in order to open his eyes to the existence of the spirit world and propel him toward a study of such things. This now made sense to Ted, and he accepted that explanation, even though no definite communication was ever delivered concerning her purpose.

And when he looked back on the experience with Miss

Flowers, Ted could see how he had been instrumental in carrying out a benevolent desire on her part to help her godson complete his education. It all seemed quite wonderful from Ted's new awareness of the loving spirit world. He saw how the spirits had prepared Marie for his arrival in Atlanta long before he decided to go there, and how they'd arranged for him to work with Harriett so that he and Marie would meet. For him, it was still more proof that he was indeed chosen for psychic work, and his life through the next several years was joyous and satisfying.

Still, sometimes an event occurred that really didn't fit in his new philosophy. There was nothing in his metaphysical studies to explain these odd episodes and strange contacts with forces unlike anything else he'd experienced.

The first unusual even came in the middle of the night, a few years after he and Marie started the Atlanta congregation. He phoned her the next morning, anxious and depressed, to give her a full description, hoping she could help him understand what had happened.

"This wasn't like any experience I've ever had," he began. "I was asleep, and then suddenly I awoke without knowing why. I tried to raise my head and look around, but I couldn't move. I was absolutely, totally paralyzed. And when I realized I couldn't move, my heart began racing and I knew that something was wrong.

"I struggled, Marie, I really struggled," he told her, "and finally I could move just enough to look around the room. The whole place was filling up with fog, like the fog rolling in across San Francisco Bay. It just kept rolling in around me until the entire room was engulfed and I couldn't see anything else. I was really scared, I thought maybe the place was on fire."

"What happened then?" Marie asked in concern.

"I kept struggling to get loose from whatever was holding me down," he said. "I wanted to get up and see what the hell was going on. By this time, my heart was beating so fast that I thought it was going to burst out of my chest. And it was painful! I wanted to scream out, I tried to scream, but nothing came out of my mouth. The fog was everywhere.

"And then I saw a tiny light in the distance. It came closer and closer through the fog until it was right in front of my face. It looked sort of like a pencil, with the part where an eraser would be just glowing, like a little light bulb. I can't remember what color it was, white, I think, or amber. And as it got up close to my face, I saw there was a hand holding this thing. I've tried and tried to remember what the hand actually looked like, but I can't. Then the hand moved this light stick even closer to me," he continued, "and just before it touched my forehead I saw a face."

"Whose face was it?" Marie interrupted.

"I don't know," he said, "I can't remember that, either. But I was terrified, Marie, scared to death. And then the light thing touched my forehead, right up in the third-eye area, and when that happened I suddenly became completely relaxed. I wasn't afraid any more. In fact, everything felt wonderful, like a surge of electricity, or of heavenly bliss and love, went through my body. I can't recall ever feeling anything like that before. It was really wonderful." He paused, remembering the vivid sensation.

"Thank God for that," Marie said. "So then what did the spirit do, once you were calm? Did you get a message or an explanation?"

"Nothing," Ted told her. "Everything went blank after that. This morning, though, I can still remember the feeling of fright. Just thinking about how it all started, I can feel that terror. And then it just fades into that blissful feeling. I'm confused, I don't know what to think about it. What on earth was that all about, Marie? What happened to me?"

"I wish I knew for certain," she replied. "But it can't be anything negative, so don't worry about it. Maybe the spirits were trying to awaken some new power within you, I don't know. Maybe you were being brought to some new level of consciousness. That might explain the electric shock."

"Well, it's knocked me for a loop," Ted said. "I feel like hell."

Marie reassured him and told him to have faith in the workings of the spirit world. Ted wanted to trust, but his physical condition left him depressed and ill, without any

energy. And that didn't feel right to him. In all his many other contacts with spirit guides, he was never physically affected. What bothered him even more was that there had been no communication and no recognizable spirit guide, just an unremembered face and the hand that touched the light stick to his head.

For days afterward, Ted was obsessed with trying to understand the experience. He and Marie discussed it repeatedly, but her explanations did not satisfy him. Deep within, Ted had serious doubts about what had been done to him, and for the first time in years he also felt anger and resentment. On several occasions he tried to question Raphael and Sharon, his familiar spirit guides, but they gave him no answers about the event. The only way Ted was able to overcome his depression and anxiety relating to the event was to tell himself the whole thing had been a frightening dream. And that only worked so long as he didn't let himself think about the hand, the face, and the jolting shock that knocked him into unconsciousness.

At night, however, the fear was worse. Ted couldn't sleep in the dark any more, so he got a night light, but still he was nervous and unable to rest well. He had frequent anxiety attacks, and when he did finally fall asleep, he often woke up again, especially between three and four a.m. In need of help, Ted went to the doctor and was given a prescription for a sleeping aid. It helped minimally, but it also affected his mood, for Ted noticed swings from a jumpy, jittery state to fits of depression.

Not long after the episode of the fog in the room, Ted had yet another new experience for which his metaphysical training had not prepared him. A new spirit showed up, or at least he thought it must be a spirit. But it was far stranger than any guides he'd ever heard of or encountered. And once again, it began in the middle of the night.

At first, he thought these encounters were also dreams, because of their utter strangeness. As he slept, an entity would appear and take Ted to an unknown location where he was instructed in what the new entity told him were "spiritual truths." This being called himself "Volmo," and as

Volmo delivered his instructions, Ted felt as if he were in a very altered state.

Each morning after a visit from Volmo, Ted awoke with curiosity and tried to recall the spiritual lessons. But he could only remember a small part of Volmo's teachings, as if much more had been blocked or simply faded away. His lack of recall was bewildering. In the past, spirit messages always came while Ted was fully awake, and he had no trouble hearing or remembering them. But with Volmo, it was different.

"This is really strange stuff," he told Marie shortly after his first few encounters with Volmo. "This spirit, or whatever Volmo is, just isn't human. I mean, the way he looks, the shape of his head and everything about him isn't human."

"I don't understand," Marie said. "What does he look like, then?"

"He's tall, really tall," Ted explained. "When I'm standing beside him, he towers a foot or more over my head, so I reckon he's six and a half feet tall, maybe seven. And massive. He's got a strong, powerful body, and it's dark colored, dull gray or olive-brown."

"I've never heard of anyone like that," Marie said, puzzled by this new entity.

"He seems really friendly and pleasant," Ted continued, "but to tell you the truth, the way he looks sure scares me. Volmo's god-awful ugly! His head doesn't have any hair, and there are bony ridges on the top. His eyes don't look human, that's for sure. They're dark, sort of yellow-gold, and there aren't any eyelids. But his mouth is the worst part, Marie. It looks like a big fish mouth, with sharp teeth."

"What about his hands?"

"I saw them pretty clearly. There are only three or four fingers on each hand, and I think they're slightly webbed. The hands look claw-like, because he's got these long, pointed nails on each finger. So what do you think this character is?"

"It's a mystery to me," Marie admitted. "You say he's teaching you things. What sort of things?"

"Well, don't laugh," Ted said, "but last night, when he came and got me out of bed, he taught me how to walk

through walls. He took me up to the wall of the bedroom and told me that it was easy to pass through solid matter. He said it all depends on how I perceive matter. Like, if I think of matter as solid, it will be solid, but if I realize that it has a different density from me, then I can control it and move through it like water.

"Volmo showed me what he meant," Ted continued. "He stuck his hand right through the wall. Then he told me to try it, and I did."

"Did it really work?" Marie asked.

"No, not the first time. But I tried it again later, and I swear, my hand went through the wall like it wasn't even there! And now that he's worked with me a few times, it's easy. We stand by the wall together, and then he takes my hand and we move through the wall, just like that!"

"Where do you go when you pass through the wall?"

"I wish I knew," Ted laughed. "I've tried to remember what happens after that, but I just don't know. It's like I blank out."

"Do you feel all right when he's with you, doing all this stuff?"

"Yeah, it's fun," Ted said. "I like it, and I'm just amazed by the things he's shown me. But I wish I knew what Volmo really is. You've taught me everything in the philosophy of spiritualism, but I don't recall anything that explains this guy."

Marie couldn't explain Volmo, either. But later when they were together discussing these nighttime visits, Marie began to get an image of the being. She asked her own spirit guides to give her some understanding, and at last an explanation came.

"I can see the image of Volmo," she told Ted excitedly. "He's here in spirit form around you right now."

She gave a physical description that matched the being Ted had come to know so intimately.

"My guides tell me that Volmo is not of this earth," she went on. "He's an interplanetary spirit, but he's gotten lost in our earth plane and now he can't escape. That's why he looks so strange, because he's never been born in our world. But

the guides tell me that you shouldn't fear him. He's completely harmless to you. In fact, they say that Volmo is a highly developed spirit in his own plane, and that he'll be of great help to you."

This information gave Ted some welcome relief, and he tried to accept the guides' explanation. They had never led him astray in the past. If some interplanetary spirit wanted to help him, he wouldn't resist. And if he was bothered by the fact that he couldn't remember much of what happened when he was with Volmo, well, he would just trust that someday everything would be made clear.

Part Four

The Maze

Expatiate free o'er all this scene of man;
A mighty maze! but not without a plan.
Pope

The spirits that I summoned up,
I now can't rid myself of.
Goethe

Sixteen

I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes,
by the ministry of the prophets.
Hosea

Volmo first appeared shortly after the night when fog filled Ted's bedroom and the mysterious hand had touched the tiny light to his forehead. The proximity of these two events seemed more than coincidental, and Ted decided that the interpretation Marie had given him must be correct. She believed the first event had somehow opened up a new level of awareness in him, which he now saw as preparation for his relationship with Volmo.

"Like attracts like," Marie told him. "Volmo's highly advanced nature drew him to you, once your own awareness and sensitivity was increased. You've a much greater perception of the world than most people do, so I guess it's natural that this strange spirit would find you amenable to his teachings."

"I guess so," Ted agreed. He relied on Marie's intuition, knowing she had been a wise, insightful teacher to him.

"But it bothers me," he added, "that I can't remember everything Volmo tells me."

"Don't worry," Marie reassured him. "The world of the spirits is so different from the world we normally know, but our guides are here to help us and steer us away from harm. God works through the spirits to take care of us."

Ted accepted this and continued his psychic activities, happy to be a part of such a grand and wonderful plan. Since God had given him a special talent, he did his best to use it wisely and well. The work with other psychics brought him

joy, and his life's path seemed laid out before him. All he had to do was follow it.

But the path, as the Bible warns, is narrow, and the way is hard. Whatever was directing his journey had still more surprises in store.

Driving home alone late one night after attending a study session, Ted experienced a dramatic shift in both time and space, with disturbing consequences. As he drove down the freeway, he suddenly began to lose all his energy. He had not been sick before, but now he was feeling dizzy and lightheaded, and he panicked, afraid he would pass out and have a wreck. The freeway was crowded with traffic, but Ted was so disoriented that he couldn't keep his eyes open. Then he completely lost consciousness.

When he awoke, he was slumped in the seat. The car was still moving forward, but his hands weren't on the steering wheel. Ted grabbed the wheel in fright and tried to shake off his dizziness, looking around in amazement that his car was still on the pavement. When he realized where he was–or rather, where he was not–he was even more shocked.

At the moment of losing consciousness, Ted was near the airport, but now he was at least ten miles farther down the freeway. And he had no memory of driving that stretch of road. He couldn't understand why the car hadn't wrecked or why his hands weren't on the wheel when he regained consciousness.

Sweating, nauseated, and still very weak, Ted pulled off the freeway into a convenience store parking lot. For a few moments he sat shakily in the car, hoping the spell would pass. His stomach was churning, and he was desperately thirsty, so at last he went into the store for a drink before trying to drive the rest of the way home.

"I could have died," he told Marie the next day, "I should have died. And I don't know why I didn't. How on earth could my car have stayed on the road like that? I was ten miles away from where I passed out!"

Just thinking about what might have happened brought back the fear and the shaky feeling he had felt that night. And he was still weak and nauseated.

"Honey, I don't know what to tell you," Marie said. "You've been through things I can't even begin to explain. All these new things in your life, and new spirits, must have been working overtime on you."

"Are you really sure it's the spirits messing with me?" Ted asked dubiously.

"I'm not sure of anything," Marie admitted, "but what else could it be?"

Ted was at a loss to understand. When his health improved he went back to his usual routine, meeting weekly with the study group. Together they continued to meditate and receive psychic messages, but now, after the incident on the freeway, there was an entirely new element in Ted's readings.

He began to see visions, different from anything the spirits had shown him before. In the past, he had been given messages for specific people, and long before that he had dreamed of disasters and deaths affecting people connected with his family, but now he got visions of widespread destruction.

The first time it happened, Ted felt that he was seeing up into the heavens, where a multitude of people were gathered. And coming through the throng was a person that seemed to be Jesus. A great stairway opened up from the heavens and reached down to the earth. Jesus came to the stairway and began his descent, with the crowd of people following after him.

When Jesus reached the earth and began to walk upon it, Ted saw that the land was burned and scorched, as if bombs had exploded and destroyed the terrain. Fire raged all across the land. But as Jesus passed through it, everything behind him was transformed back to its normal state, green and beautiful, with birds and butterflies in abundance.

Ted had no idea what the vision was trying to tell him. The images of destruction were profoundly disturbing, yet he didn't recognize what part of the earth he had seen. And he didn't know if the vision was to be understood literally or symbolically, for it was unlike all the other visions the spirits had shown him.

Another night, while working with the meditation group, Ted was again presented with a vision of terrible devastation. In this one, he first saw a map of the American eastern seaboard. As he watched, great earthquakes suddenly erupted, rippling with mighty force across the land. And then whole sections of the coast broke loose and sank, submerged in the boiling ocean.

Such visions recurred, each time bringing Ted sorrow and despair. One night when a scene presented itself, this time Ted not only viewed it, he was part of it. He saw himself in a populated low, coastal area, and he was running down the streets, warning the people to move inland.

"You've got to get away from the coast!" he shouted. "Earthquakes are coming, and tidal waves, and you'll be destroyed if you stay here!"

But the people just laughed at his warnings and ignored him. At last he gave up and sadly turned away. As he walked up the road, he paused and turned back for one last look. Behind him, a great tidal wave washed over the town, sweeping all the people away in utter destruction.

When the vision passed, Ted was in tears. Overwhelmed by the horrendous chaos, it frightened him to think that these visions might come true. But no messages came to explain the purpose of these scenes, nor did they seem intended for any particular person. His spirit guides, usually responsive, were curiously silent when he asked them for help in understanding what it all meant and what he should do about the visions.

He felt as if the spirits had failed him then. They told him nothing about Volmo, the fog and wand episode, the missing time on the freeway, or these frightening visions. With this realization, Ted felt an internal shift or turning point, as if he sensed a change coming in his life.

Since 1970, when he began his psychic training, his path had steadily ascended in every possible way. But now, his life and his work began declining. At first all he felt was a general loss of well-being. His health deteriorated, and he was plagued by physical pains and discomfort, although when his doctor examined him nothing specific seemed to be wrong. It

didn't take him long to realize that his decline had started after the night with the fog and the light. And after this latest episode on the freeway, the symptoms grew worse.

Hoping to stop his general deterioration, Ted began a rigorous regimen of exercise and healthier diet. All he wanted was to feel good again, and for a while his new routine seemed to help. At least his body slowly returned to a better state, but psychologically he knew he was gradually slipping downward. It became harder and harder to concentrate on his spiritual work. His nights turned fitful, and without sleep he was losing the serenity of mind so necessary for psychic effectiveness.

Night after night he awoke, restless and agitated, without knowing why. His nerves grew edgy, and his usual good nature gave way to fits of depression and doubt. Still, he strove to keep his physical strength, but this too slowly ebbed away.

One night, waking up with a start, Ted felt compelled to go to his typewriter. A story was emerging in his thoughts, and he had to write it down. When he finished and read what he'd written, Ted was filled with a sense of wonder and confusion. He wasn't a writer, but in his hands was a story, unclear in its meaning but powerfully moving to his heart:

Barefoot and wearing his usual overalls and T-shirt, Karly Kane made an interesting sight as he followed closely behind his uncle's combine, waiting and watching for the large, noisy machine to uncover a rabbit's home. This was one of the many facets of enjoyment offered to the small lad, restricted to this isolated farm life, and he never let these opportunities slip by. It was the first time this summer that his uncles had gone to the hay fields, and Karly was beside himself with excitement.

He felt as much a part of the harvest as any field hand present, and the excitement of the whole procedure showed in his every expression. The huge machine, the laborers stacking the bales, the shouts ringing over the deafening noise, and the sweet smell of freshly cut hay were all packaged into a composition of a day's work. And to Karly it was all very natural, something not to be questioned, only accepted as part of existence itself, and he lived

every moment of it with total fulfillment. It pleased him to be part of it, no matter how small or trivial his part may have seemed.

Small rabbits would scurry in all directions as the thundering combine slashed its path across the vast hay fields. Karly, alert and keen-eyed for any sign of rabbit fur, would launch into a wild scene of chasing, darting, and zigzagging over the field. As fast as his little legs would carry him, he pursued his favorite sport until he made his catch. He never seemed to grow tired, and the majority of his time in the hay field was spent in such activity.

Only occasionally was he interrupted by one of his uncles or farm hands, and then it was only a signal to get out of the way of the combine or the workers. Sometimes one of them would be the first to spot a rabbit, pointing a finger in that direction and watching the amusing chase. Hardly a day went by that he did not managed to capture at least one of these tiny critters, and when he did he would coddle the frightened animal carefully in his arms, trying to soothe and calm it after its disturbing calamity. Karly loved animals, and his ability to tame wildlife was known throughout the community.

Tired and hungry, this eight-year-old boy waved at his two uncles operating the huge machine and turned towards home. He crossed the dusty field slowly, feeling his exhaustion and fatigue. He had been out since early dawn when the dew was still fresh and moist to his bare feet. It was now noon, and the first pangs of hunger began to gnaw at him, for he had eaten nothing since early morning.

The scent of the baled hay filled his nostrils with its clean and earthy fragrance. This familiar aroma, so soothing and relaxing, contributed to a restful state of mind that was now enveloping his consciousness. He crossed a plank that lay over the narrow ditch which separated the hay field from the cotton patch and continued forward down a long row of cotton which summer had turned into small bushes.

It seemed only yesterday that the tiny seeds had been planted into these countless furrows of rich, black earth. Soon they would lose their greenness by turning into brown, ugly, leafless stalks with little bolls of white, fluffy cotton. Karly thought it was all quite magical, and he hoped one day to see the magician at work and take him home to meet his family.

Nearing the end of this realm of toil and labor, Karly saw that the black dirt beneath his feet began to lose its darkened hue. Generally this would be a welcome sight for this weary little soul, because it meant that he would be drawing close to the sand bed, and that was halfway home. But at this moment his mind had managed to escape him and encircle his total surroundings, leaving him without any point of concentration. For a brief but timeless moment, he was alive and breathing the very essence of his environment.

It was the squirming of his captured prey that brought him out of this mystical daze and back into a familiar state of consciousness which divided everything into its individual perspective: cotton, hay, laboring hands, noise, and sweat, all of which had its recognizable seat in Karly's reality.

As the hot Alabama sun was blistering down from the cloudless sky, his tired little feet carried him onward through the hot sand.

"I wish I had worn my sandals," he thought. "And some cold water from Grandy's well would be so good."

He wondered what he had done with the straw hat that Uncle Jim had bought him in Fayette last week.

These were thoughts occupying Karly's mind as he made his way home, toting his little rabbit carefully in his arms. It was beginning to squirm a lot now, Karly noticed, and he held it a little tighter to keep it from breaking loose and scampering away like the last one he had caught. He found himself fighting to concentrate and focus on his new pet and direct himself forward toward the house.

Suddenly, he seemed to be feeling odd and sleepy and heavy. Just ahead he saw something inviting, and for a fleeting moment he wondered why he had not noticed it before, as many times as he had passed this way. Shade!

Lying ahead where the sand bed began to fade into the dirt road that led home, there was a sloping bank covered with tall pines and hardwoods. Cudzu, which years before had been planted there to fight erosion, had long since gotten out of control and managed to climb and grab hold of every available limb and twig along the embankment. Quietly and secretively it had ensnarled itself around every tree and bush until they had surrendered to its plan. Insidiously, the vine hung from each branch and tree with such thickness that its growth set off an umbrella or shade that anyone

would have found inviting on such a hot August day. Karly could not resist. He walked into this mysterious shade that he had never noticed before.

Karly stood there in the welcome shade daydreaming of cool water, Grandy's hot biscuits, and tea cakes for dessert. But these thoughts were beginning to float away, becoming meaningless to Karly as his eyelids suddenly grew so heavy that he could no longer blink. Mentally he felt as if he were in slow motion, and he could no longer move his body.

Expanded awareness was enveloping him once again, and it became impossible to distinguish himself from anything else. He was everything and everything was he. He felt as if he were in a vacuum where the space that surrounded him was so dense he could suffocate in its thickness. Then the thickness seemed to carry him upwards.

No longer could he feel the earth beneath his feet. A soft, pale light with no origin slowly began to fill his surroundings. It was cloudy and somewhat misty, and it made everything indistinguishable. He wondered where he was and what was happening. He could no longer see the inviting shade, and he thought for a moment that he was lost. He felt his heart begin to race.

From afar, a voice called to him, but he could see no one nor find its direction. He found himself moving forward as the hidden voice directed him. He asked where he was and where he was going, but he received no answer. At last he was allowed to rest on something he could not see but could only feel, and the voice directed him to sleep before he returned home.

Somehow, this was all familiar to him, in some strange and forgotten way, but at the same time he desperately wanted to reach out for his mother, his Grandy, or anyone who loved him and not to remember any of it from the past nor in the future. His breathing rhythm began to ease, and his mind slipped away. He sighed heavily, his body relaxed, and his arms went limp.

He awoke to the sound of music. It was strange music but comforting. A voice spoke to him again, but a different one than before. It sounded somewhat familiar, but he could not remember where he had heard it. It told him to follow, and he did. The strange mist faded, and before him in the distance were many animals playing. They were calm and tame, not wild like the critters he knew back at home.

There were squirrels, birds, deer, raccoons, and some that Karly had never seen before.

Near them was a group of small children singing. He listened to their heavenly voices giving off musical tones of a quality Karly had never heard before. There were twenty or more of them, and Karly was amazed at their odd voices and their dazzling blue coveralls. He reached to draw closer to them, to touch one of them, but an invisible force restricted his mobility.

"No," the voice said, "you cannot be with them at this time."

Karly felt himself becoming extremely angry. He struggled and kicked to get down from whatever was holding him. At that moment he felt himself traveling at a tremendous rate of speed. Streaks of light seemed to be flying by in all directions. Then with a jolt, Karly found himself standing in the sand bed. The shade tree was no longer there, and neither was his little rabbit.

Once again, he felt his anger raging inside, and he started running home as fast as he could. He was confused and feeling strange. He wanted his mother and Grandy. He would tell them what had just happened and that someone had taken his rabbit. And he knew that somehow they would make it all okay. They always did, and they would help him get his rabbit back.

He could see the farmhouse just ahead. Grandy was standing on the porch waving at him, and as he looked ahead at his home and his adorable grandma standing there, he knew that he would not be going to the fields to play again, ever. He had changed somehow, and now things were different. The field and the rabbits no longer interested him. He just wanted to be at home with his family.

Seventeen

Throw out the lifeline, throw out the lifeline,
Someone is sinking today.
E. S. Ufford

The cotton fields, the farmhouse, the rabbits and combine and Grandy, almost everything in the story of Karly Kane was drawn from Ted's own childhood. He had been just like Karly, playing and running, even taming wild animals, and maybe these similarities were what moved him so deeply as he read over the story.

What confused him, however, was the strange incident of the disappearing shade tree, the hidden voice, and the choir of children in blue coveralls. Ted searched his childhood memories, but none of these details came to mind. He was stumped to explain why such a story would have felt so compelling that he would have gotten up in the middle of the night to write it down.

He showed the story to Marie and described how the whole thing occurred. If he couldn't explain it, perhaps she would have some insight. Marie thought about it a long time and eventually decided that once again, in a totally new way, the spirits were changing Ted's psychic task.

"Maybe this is their way of showing you what they want you to do," she offered. "You've done wonderful work with adults, but maybe now the spirits want you to write metaphysical stories for children. With stories like this, you could bring our philosophy down to the level of young minds and begin to make them aware of the vast, benevolent spiritual world that surrounds them."

That seemed reasonable to Ted, and he became excited at

the prospect. If the spirits wanted to inspire him to write, he had no objections. But days passed without any more stories coming to his mind, and he began to wonder if Marie's explanation was right. One story certainly wasn't enough, and, besides, he didn't really grasp the meaning of Karly Kane's adventure. Was the scene of wonderful animals and the choir of children meant to be a vision of heaven? And why had his rabbit been taken away? It didn't make much sense to him.

Neither did his continuing curiosity and fear about the night his room had filled with fog. In spite of the faith he placed in the spirit world, memories of that experience always unnerved him, and they wouldn't go away. Ted prayed often and sincerely to God for help and for answers, but without success.

A few nights later, Ted was vaguely aware of getting out of bed again, but the whole thing was so fuzzy that he dismissed it as part of a dream. The next morning he dressed and poured his first cup of coffee, and as he crossed the room he noticed a piece of paper in his typewriter. Surprised, he picked it up and read, growing more amazed with every word.

A stack of typed pages lay on his desk, but Ted was certain he had not put them there. And the story they contained was nothing he had ever thought about, much less written. This story had nothing to do with children. Instead, it recounted odd information about Margaret Mitchell, the renowned author of *GONE WITH THE WIND*. She had lived in Atlanta, as Ted well knew, but he had never had any unusual interest in her or in the book.

So where, he wondered, had this material come from? Ted lived alone, and although he didn't remember doing it, he finally realized that he must have been the one who typed the story. There was no other explanation. His dream of getting out of bed must have been real, but he had absolutely no memory of going to the desk or of typing anything. If the spirits had prompted this story, maybe he could find a clue in it to help him understand its purpose.

He reread it, fascinated by the story it told and mystified that such a tale could have originated in his mind:

Clark Gable escorted Margaret Mitchell through the waiting crowd and down to the stage. The applause was deafening. She opened her address to the audience with an immediate thanks to the many people involved in making this world premier of GONE WITH THE WIND so successful. There were many famous names present at this gathering, and her congratulations went to all of them who directly or indirectly played a part in bringing her Scarlett to such fame. She paid special tribute to David Selznik and publicly acclaimed at that moment that he had chosen the perfect cast.

She finished with her credits and bowed to the thundering fans, and as she did this her invisible and stealthy partner made similar gestures. This silent figure who was at her side, watching, waiting, giving her strength, followed across the platform close at hand. They were like two sisters who shared a secret that the world would never know nor understand.

Margaret had had an impulse to write a story for years. It was a pull within her that she did not understand, and it had been with her long before Scarlett O'Hara was born from her pen. As she grew older and the desire stronger, she stopped fighting the urge and released this boiling energy through paper and pen. When she did, Scarlett, Rhett, Melanie, and all the rest of these vivid characters came forth in a tale of all tales that left their audience breathless as they lived, breathed, and cried through the pages of time Margaret had so well put together.

Georgians would not accept that these characters were not historical figures, who had once occupied the streets of Atlanta. Many searched through historical documents and public records trying to uncover any line or connection that would prove these names not to be figments of Margaret's imagination. Even today, the Chamber of Commerce at Jonesboro, Georgia, will verify that frequently tourists will seek directions to the plantation so dear to Scarlett's heart, Tara.

As the years crept slowly by and Margaret began to unfold more and more of her story, she came to realize that she was getting assistance from some strange source of which she had no knowledge or understanding. This puzzled her, and she tried at first to deny it. She began to take long breaks from her writing, thinking that she must be tiring herself, but this proved not to be the answer. Rest

seemed to make it stronger, because it was obviously more noticeable after periods of relaxation.

She came to grips with it one day, when to her surprise her pen continued to write quite legibly as her thoughts wandered from the subject being expressed. This frightened her a bit, and she made an effort to discuss it with a close associate, who scolded her and advised a vacation, claiming that Margaret had been working too hard.

Margaret did not pursue this matter again with her friend, but she did uncover some of the truths she was seeking in Atlanta's public library. There she discovered enough to satisfy her curiosity through the psychic material available at that time, even though it was limited. She quit fighting with herself and readily gave in to her secret source of thought, which she could not see but only feel. She developed an appreciation for this inspirational writing coming to her, and as she did, her work became easier and more enjoyable. Margaret went to her grave never admitting nor fully understanding that she had been a channel for a spirit who had been with her, guiding her for many years.

The spirit was a highly evolved soul that had once lived a life similar to Scarlett O'Hara's, and her tale was as strong as the Ancient Mariner's and she had to tell it. She needed a release for this energy, and Margaret was her channel. Through Margaret's pen, she would be able to confess her unjust deeds that had hurt so many when she was on the earth plane. The knots that had so tightly held her soul from spiritual perfection would be untied. It would help Margaret in her own spiritual development as well, and entertainment would be brought to countless millions. Quietly and secretively, she moved in around Margaret and they formed a team that produced one of the greatest novels of our time.

Margaret was aware of the intelligent and friendly shadow that was around her, and she felt that somehow, some way, there was more than just a novel unfolding before her eyes. Today, from beyond the veil, the real truths have been revealed to her. A friendship and love of deeper profoundness exist between these two souls. They look back on their novel and its proud achievements, as together they climb to a more evolved and spiritual expression.

Ted finished the last page and lay the story aside in utter

bewilderment. He knew nothing about Margaret Mitchell's life, and he certainly had never thought that she was possessed of any secret source of inspiration.

"So what is this trying to tell me?" he wondered. "Does it have anything to do with the Karly Kane story?"

But that didn't make sense. No other spirit could have produced that story through him, he thought, because Karly was so much like himself. Everything about his two nighttime writing ventures was impossible to understand, and no other stories appeared after that. Like so many other events in his life, these had no clear meaning that he could discern. If the spirits were indeed behind the two tales, Ted decided they would have to be a whole lot clearer with their messages before he could grasp their intentions.

The details of the Margaret Mitchell story continued to run through his mind, however. As he saw it, the story revealed how Margaret was used as a channel for the spirit world. At least that much of the tale had relevance to his own situation. And *GONE WITH THE WIND* had given the world great enjoyment. Was there a message here for him, after all? Did this tale imply that Ted, like Margaret, should allow the spirits to bring good things to humanity by cooperating with them?

To satisfy his curiosity, Ted read *GONE WITH THE WIND*. And as he read, he began to make an association between Margaret's psychic ability and his own. Through Margaret's ability, he saw that she had created a literary masterpiece, surely a good and wonderful thing. Was the message that he, too, would offer some solace to the world through his talents? He did not really know, but it made him uncomfortable to get caught up in such egotistical thinking. He just didn't feel worthy of such aspirations.

Also, in reading the book Ted noticed a passage about Scarlett's recurring dream. In it she was frightened of being lost in a fog. Ted thought of the mysterious fog that had brought him such fear. He wondered if it were Margaret herself who had been afraid of the fog, rather than the fictitious Scarlett. Was Margaret relating a personal trauma? Again, Ted could not be certain, but something about this idea made

him feel as if he were on to an important clue.

One night, during the time he was reading the book, Ted had an experience in his sleep, hearing a voice. It told him that he should no longer worry about the fog. As with *GONE WITH THE WIND*, the voices assured him, something good would come from the experience. And the next morning when he remembered the voice, Ted thought he now understood the channeled message in the story he had written. He stopped dwelling on the fearful event with the fog and tried to resume his usual peace of mind and activities. The obsessive anxiety seemed to have ended.

He thought back to the terrifying encounter in his bedroom, of the fog, the light wand, and the jolt that made him feel as if he were going to die. That certainly had not been a pleasant experience for him, and neither had the visions of massive destruction which had plagued him, nor the loss of time and the resulting illness from his strange episode on the freeway. All of these things had taken their toll, mentally and physically, and had made Ted question his involvement with the spirit world. But the reassuring story of how *GONE WITH THE WIND* had come from channeled information acted as an antidote to his fears. Whatever price he might personally have to pay, he concluded that the benefits of giving himself to psychic work were worth the price.

With renewed resolve, Ted plunged back into the spiritualist work. He tried to regain that sense of the positive and beautiful which had sustained him over the past years. Yet in spite of his dedicated efforts, he felt something changing, a slipping away of his strength.

It surprised him that none of his associates noticed how he was losing speed and generally falling apart. By degrees, his nerves grew even worse, and the bouts of depression came more frequently. Weeks of losing sleep, of awakening several times a night in an agitated state, finally brought him to a desperate point where he needed help to get any rest. He began drinking at night, hoping that enough alcohol would knock him out by bedtime and allow him some sleep, or at least unconsciousness. It helped at first, but before long even the alcohol could not block out his continuous restlessness.

For months Ted covered up his situation and carried on with his psychic readings and study sessions, hoping that whatever was disturbing him would subside. Instead, however, the mental and physical fatigue was relentless, dragging him under.

The actual breakdown hit while he was at work. Ted had been on the verge of tears throughout the morning, without knowing why. All during the previous week, in fact, he could barely keep a grip on his self-control. His coworkers were a constant irritation on his fragile nerves, he was angry and impatient with customers, and everything crowded in upon him at once.

At two p.m. on Wednesday, after hours of enduring this emotional turmoil, Ted quietly snapped. He stopped what he was doing, ignored the jangling of the phones in the background, and tidied up the papers on his desk. He grew unnaturally calm and serene as he walked over to the secretary and said, "Call someone from the main office to come down here immediately. I'm sick, and I'm leaving now to go to my doctor, and I won't be back today."

As if under some other control than his own, Ted turned and walked out in a daze, heedless of his job, his responsibility as the only officer on duty at the branch bank, heedless of everything but the need to leave. He got into the car and drove to the doctor's office.

"I have to see the doctor," he told the receptionist without any apparent emotion.

"You don't have an appointment?" she replied. "We'll have to work you in if time allows, or we can give you an appointment tomorrow, perhaps."

Ted's calm demeanor did not change, but his voice took on an altogether different tone. "I have to see him now!" he said emphatically. "I'm not leaving until I do."

He sat down with a finality, and the receptionist hurried into the doctor's private office. Shortly afterward, the doctor came out to the waiting room. He looked closely at Ted's face, realized that his patient was in serious emotional trouble, and then gently led him by the arm back into the office.

"Let's go in here and talk for a minute," he said, directing

Ted to a chair. "What's wrong, Ted? I'm very concerned, so tell me, what's the problem?"

Ted burst into tears, unable to answer. The doctor let him cry until the outpouring finally eased. But Ted still could not say anything.

"What's wrong?" the doctor asked again. "You've been coming here to see me now about once a month for the past six months or so. You've had a number of problems, rashes, upset stomach, severe headaches. It all seems to be stress-related, Ted. We've done a thorough examination, and we haven't found anything physically wrong with you. All the symptoms seem to be coming from some sort of stress."

"I don't know what's wrong," Ted replied. "Maybe it's the pressure I'm under at work."

But he really had no idea of what was at the heart of his constant tension. His job did involve a great deal of pressure, as there were many changes underway at the bank. He knew there was a dim prospect of some employees being laid off, so maybe that was the problem. Maybe his body was simply responding to the stress of the transitional situation and would eventually pass as things at work were resolved.

Yet even being out of work for a while should not have threatened him so strongly. Financially he was in good shape, after all, and his skills were highly marketable if he had to find other employment. But there was nothing else in his life that he could pinpoint as a source of irritation.

The doctor called in a psychiatrist from a nearby office for a consultation. When they were finished, the doctor returned and offered Ted some advice.

"I think you're at a crisis point, Ted, with all this stress," he said. "Probably the best thing you can do for yourself is to let me send you up to Northside Hospital to the psych unit for evaluation. There's a lot of good work going on in there. Check yourself in for a few days and let Dr. Nichols work with you. They can give you something to help you sleep, and maybe by this time next week you'll feel strong enough to go back to work. I feel this would be your best course of action right now."

Unable to think clearly about any alternatives, Ted

accepted his doctor's advice. He went home and gathered up a few personal belongings and drove to the hospital. The psychiatrist had already left orders for him, so after he was admitted Ted received an injection and went to his room, where he slept until the next morning.

He felt safer knowing that a staff of trained professionals was just outside his room, and that other patients were around while he slept. As he dozed off, Ted thought of his cold, lonely apartment and how he'd grown to hate and fear it when darkness approached. It didn't matter that other people weren't in his hospital room with him, just knowing they were nearby gave him enough comfort to allow the sedative to work without resistance. It was the best rest he'd had in months.

Eighteen

In the middle of the journey of our life
I came to myself within a dark wood
where the straight way was lost.
Dante

Ted's meeting the following day with Dr. Nichols led to a long discussion about what might be causing his problems. The doctor's questions helped Ted rule out certain obvious possibilities.

"How are things at work, Ted?" the doctor asked. "Are you having any particular problems with your job, or maybe a coworker?"

"Not really," Ted answered. "I've been pretty happy at work, although recently there has been talk of some upcoming changes, layoffs. That's not the best news, but it hasn't really worried me a lot. Basically, the conditions at the bank are great; reasonable hours and nice offices. And I like the folks I work with, they're great."

"All right," Dr. Nichols nodded, "that's good. Now, is there any other area where you feel things might be critical, like with your girlfriend or some family member?"

"I'm not seeing anyone special," Ted shook his head, "so no problems there. And I get along fine with my family. Don't you think I've gone over these same ideas already, trying to figure this out? I can't find the problem. And I can't sleep. What's the matter with me?"

"We know what's the matter," Dr. Nichols said, "you're suffering from stress. Sometimes the causes are obvious, but sometimes it takes more work to discover them. Your current

job situation seems mildly stressful right now, but nothing you've told me so far would account for such strong symptoms. What about your other activities? Are you involved in sports, or hobbies?"

"I do spend a lot of time on my psychic work," Ted admitted, briefly explaining his association with the spiritualist group. "It takes a lot of emotional energy, dealing with people's problems and trying to give them the best advice from the spirits. But I'm keeping myself in pretty good shape physically. I exercise, and I'm careful about what I eat."

"Could you be overextending yourself there?"

"I doubt it. My schedule has always been this busy, and I've never had problems like this before."

"Well, then, perhaps this strain is stemming from a long accumulation of small problems," the doctor commented. "If worry over a lot of little things is added to your present mild stress about a possible job loss, that might explain your overall fatigue. Let's talk about things from the past that you might still be dealing with emotionally."

So they delved into past situations, everything from the conflict with Jill in Sun Valley and his years of schooling, up to the transitional turmoil at the bank. They also discussed Ted's current increased alcohol consumption, but it soon became clear that the drinking was a symptom of the stress, not a cause.

Another area of concern was Ted's lack of any recent happy romantic relationship. When the doctor realized that Ted had not been seriously involved with a woman since Jill, he wondered why.

"Is there something about an intimate relationship that bothers you?" he asked. "Are you feeling isolated, or as if your personal life doesn't have any real direction?"

"No, I don't think so," Ted said. "I date fairly frequently, and I like having a good time. But I'm not feeling especially lonely, or pushed to find someone and settle down. I now lean more towards the detached, less emotional, more unconditional style of relationships, rather than the traditional."

After the brief discussion of the past, all the doctor could suggest was vague, cumulative stress from many incidents

and situations. Nothing extraordinary stood out as a serious problem, although if Ted had confided about the episodes of paranormal activities–the fog and shock, the missing time–the doctor might have thought differently. But Ted did not. He had insisted to himself that the fog event must have been a dream, and the missing time he attributed to an illness, without trying to explain driving the ten miles in an unconscious state. Without this additional information, the doctor had no indication to tell why Ted's stress was so severe at that particular time.

The doctor prescribed a variety of medications, hoping to find one that would give Ted some relief from his sleeplessness and frayed nerves. None of them, however, produced lasting positive results. Some of them simply had no effect, and when others did cause a change in his energy level or his moods, Ted felt uncomfortable. He had never enjoyed the effects of drugs, not since the night with the marijuana octopus, and even though he had recently been drinking he didn't like the stuporous effects. He preferred his normal personality and state of mind.

At last one of the medications proved effective without disturbing him, and the doctor also advised him to stay hospitalized another week, to meet with the group counseling sessions.

"Take a little extra time now," the doctor said, "just to be sure. Frankly, I'd like you keep away from your old schedule at the bank a while longer. You appear to be in much better shape, and maybe all you really needed was a few good nights of sleep, but let's not push it. The same goes for your work with Marie, too, not until you're sure you're feeling healthy again."

"But I'm going to have to go back to those things sooner or later," Ted replied. "That's my life. Will putting it off a week really help?"

"I think so," the doctor nodded. "I feel like you need a complete break, a total change, to get back your old vitality. And the group sessions are important. Something may come out that we've overlooked."

Ted acceded. He was comfortable in the facility, sleeping

more soundly than ever. As his good humor returned with his strength, he enjoyed talking with the staffers as well as with the patients. The two weeks of his residence in the hospital passed quickly, and Ted's improvement was obvious. But in order to test the permanence of this change, the doctor recommended a trial run outside the facility.

"I think you're ready for a weekend pass," the doctor told him. "A few days back home, nothing strenuous, just to see how you feel. If everything goes all right, that will tell us a lot about your progress."

"Fine," Ted agreed, knowing that he really had improved and should have no trouble in the apartment again. Still, his first response was uneasy, a vague disturbance in the back of his mind, which he did his best to ignore.

He checked out and returned home, but his first night in the apartment was not what he'd hoped. Even before the sky grew dark, Ted had turned on all the lights and tried to fight back against his increasing nervousness. He couldn't concentrate on the TV programs, but he kept it on for company, to block out the night's uneasy quiet.

As the hours dragged by, Ted's energy waned and his nerves grew worse. Once or twice his breath would catch and his heart would flutter irregularly as a panic attack started, and Ted had to fight for control. He needed to rest, and no matter how long he delayed it, eventually he would have to go to bed. He gulped down his sedative and waited for it to take effect, and then he reluctantly walked to the bedroom door.

The room was brilliantly lit, with even the night light shining in the corner, but it felt cold and wrong. He went through the motions, washed, brushed and got into the bed, turning off the overhead light. Ted was too tired to keep his eyes open, but as soon as he lay back, memories and images flooded into his mind. The room wouldn't let him forget.

Being back in the bedroom where he had experienced the fog and the shock of the light wand disturbed him so deeply that he couldn't sleep. Even the medication had no effect, and his fear, shapeless and relentless, grew overwhelming. Less than ten minutes after trying to sleep, Ted was up and wide

awake, back in the living room as far from the bed as he could get. He stayed up the entire night, walking the floor restlessly, smoking cigarettes, watching TV, anything to pass the time.

The next night, it was the same story–no sleep, no rest, only inexplicable anxiety. And his depression returned with a vengeance, darkening everything within him. By the third day, Ted suddenly had the feeling that he just didn't want to go on living. It had not been a conscious thought, but all at once it seemed like the only possible escape from his misery.

"I'm just going to get it over with," he told himself, and then he walked out onto the apartment balcony and climbed over the railing.

The ground was two stories below, but there was no fear in his mind as he debated whether he should jump. In fact, he felt curiously free of emotion, as if that part of his mind was already at a distance. His only thoughts were logical ones, questions of execution and repercussion. He wasn't sure that a fall of that distance would kill him, and he wondered if he would be committed involuntarily to a mental asylum if he failed to die.

Leaning out from the railing, Ted looked around and noticed some trees in the near distance and behind them another apartment balcony. Somebody was there, watching him, and that realization triggered a response in Ted, snapping him back to reality.

The stranger on the balcony stared at him intently for a moment and then called out, "Hey, man, what are you doing out there?"

Guilty and embarrassed by his predicament, Ted wondered what he could say that wouldn't give away his suicidal intentions. The whole situation was quite obvious, however, and the stranger was clearly alarmed.

"You're not going to jump, are you?" he shouted.

"No," Ted shouted back, trying to sound very casual, "no, I'm just getting some fresh air. Everything's okay, really."

It was a ridiculous statement, considering his precarious perch over the railing, but he was too flustered to come up with anything better.

Seeing himself through the stranger's eyes, Ted felt ashamed of his actions and the weakness behind them. Abashed, he climbed back over the railing to safety and went inside. He mixed a strong drink, ignoring the warnings against taking alcohol and sedatives together, and carried the drink back out on the balcony. Glass in hand, Ted waved to the stranger, who was still watching intently from across the way, and the man waved back.

They smiled at each other, and the moment of despair passed. Ted had a second strong drink and finally fell asleep for the first time in three days. When he awoke the next morning, however, he could still feel the disorienting effects of the medicine and alcohol.

"Dear God," he thought shakily, "I could have died last night! First the stunt on the balcony, and then the liquor and pills."

If he could fall apart that badly in such a short time, Ted realized, he was not ready to be out of the hospital. The brink of self-destruction had been frighteningly close, and he didn't trust himself to wait for the extended weekend pass to expire. Too nervous to drive, he called his cousin.

"Catherine," he said, "can I ask a favor? I need you to take me somewhere. I'm not in good enough shape to do it myself."

She arrived half an hour later, full of questions that he evaded, and drove him back to Northside. Although it was a day earlier than he was scheduled to return, Ted checked back into the facility. Catherine stayed to visit briefly, but Ted was eager for her to leave. All he wanted was his wonderful bed and the security of his crowded surroundings. He slept again, deeply, well into the next day.

On Monday when the doctor made rounds, Ted told him about the weekend.

"I went through hell," he said. "I was so upset that it finally reached a point where I didn't think I could go on living."

"What exactly was it that upset you?" the doctor asked.

"That's just it," Ted shrugged, "I can't put my finger on any one thing. I was okay until bedtime, and the darker it got

the worse I felt."

Neither of them understood why being alone at night there had pushed Ted to the brink of suicide. It had been impossible to relax and sleep in the apartment, but it was no problem at all once Ted was back in the psych unit, and that wasn't consistent. He let himself wonder briefly if his worry had anything to do with the memory of the fog-filled night. But it had occurred so long before that Ted didn't think it could be causing stress now, especially since it had never happened again. Besides, how could just a nightmare, or encounter with a spirit guide, bother him so deeply?

At his doctor's suggestion, Ted agreed to stay in the hospital another week, and during this time he became very involved in the group therapy sessions. He gained much strength from the assertiveness-training program, and his general state of mind greatly improved.

Even his psychic ability functioned in a positive way as Ted interacted with other patients. One of them was a middle-aged woman whose teenaged daughter had found with her head stuck in the oven, unconscious from gas fumes.

It took several days for her to recover physically, and then she had been brought into the sessions. Ted noticed how withdrawn she was during meetings. No matter what anyone else said, she kept silent, away from the group, sitting alone and crying. She refused to tell the others anything about herself or her problems or why she had wanted to die.

Watching her one day, Ted had a psychic insight. He saw a clear vision of a time, months before, in which this woman had been raped during a break-in at her home. And he saw that she had never told anyone about this, not her family, the doctor, or the police. From this, he understood why the woman felt so withdrawn and how complex her emotions had become as she hid her own trauma for fear of her family's reactions. Ted hesitated to reveal this information, but thereafter, during the therapy sessions, he tried to lead the discussion around to such events, hoping the woman would respond.

It didn't work. The woman refused to take the bait, and she was not getting any better. Ted finally realized he had no

choice but to tell her what he had seen in the vision. He had had to make delicate decisions before about what to reveal and what to withhold in psychic readings, and in this case he felt certain that the woman would benefit. Until she faced the situation, she could never get past it.

"I think," he said, "that you're a victim of rape. And I think you feel so ashamed of it, so horrible about it, that that's what is wrong with you. You just won't talk about it and get all these feelings out."

The woman lost control, denying everything and cursing him for interfering. She became so hysterical that she had to be sedated and put to bed. Ted naturally felt responsible, for these weren't the results he had hoped for, and regretted having spoken. It seemed ironic that his psychic gifts allowed him to discern the problems of others but would not give him a clue about his own, he thought sadly.

The next day, however, the woman thanked him for forcing her to face the problem.

"I would never have been able to do it by myself," she said gratefully, and Ted watched with great relief as her recovery proceeded rapidly.

The hospital staffers who had witnessed the whole event were fascinated and talked about it with Ted. He admitted confidentially that he had psychic abilities and was surprised by their serious interest. Although the staffers never asked him for specific help after that, they deliberately steered a few difficult cases in his direction.

And every time the same thing happened. Ted got a reading on the person's situation and would relate it. The patient would angrily deny the information and go through great upheaval, telling him to mind his own business, but then the healing process would begin. His accuracy mystified the medical staff. And nobody asked Ted to check himself out of the hospital until he felt ready.

He ended up staying for three months, not only because he was benefiting personally from the therapy, sleeping well at night and healing both mind and body. He also stayed because he had made good friends there and was serving a positive function within the group. He saw some of the

patients recover quickly, thanks to the psychic information he was able to share with them, and that was gratifying. But there was no one to perform the same function for him.

When he decided he was ready to be on his own again, the doctor recommended that Ted take a leave of absence from his job, go home to his parents, and let his strength fully return. Ted readily agreed and closed up his apartment before his parents came to get him. For the next three months he spent time visiting with old friends and relatives, feeling stronger every day. Those ties brought him back to a sense of normalcy and control.

And with a new perspective, Ted realized that he no longer wanted to continue at the bank and fall back into the stressful situations that apparently had led to his collapse. So when he returned to Atlanta, his plan was to give notice and train someone to take his place.

The bank officials, however, immediately made it clear that he really was not welcome back at all, not after his stint in the psych unit. It didn't matter that Ted's commitment had been voluntary, nor that his problems stemmed from stress rather than from a mental disorder. Like so many uninformed people, the officials in charge of personnel suffered from stereotypical fears about "crazy people."

So before Ted could even tender his resignation, he was advised that the company considered him unfit for work. Instead of taking him back, they offered to put him on their insurance disability program and recommended he receive a paycheck for the next three years.

Ted, of course, couldn't have been happier. With this financial security, he was free to return to Alabama, build up his strength, and spend some time with his aging parents.

For the first year, Ted enjoyed his renewed relationships with his family and resumed old friendships in Tuscaloosa. But eventually he became restless and wanted more from his life. Since his income was steady, even without working, he decided to do some recreational, therapeutic, travel and exploration. In a very short time, Ted visited many places, such as California, New York, Florida, the Caribbean islands, and Guatemala. His treks gave him plenty of adventure, but

at no time did any further paranormal experiences occur. He believed that whatever the spirits had been doing with him, all such matters were now out of his life since he no longer involved himself in the spiritualist group's activities.

By 1981, he felt emotionally strong and ready to go back to work. Ted took a job managing a prominent restaurant in Tuscaloosa and gave up the last year of disability income. For the next three years, his life was happy and uneventful, filled with the typical pleasure of close family contact and a comfortable social life. There were problems, of course, but they were just normal situations, not supernatural events.

He also kept in touch with Marie, and they remained close friends even though he was no longer with the group. She understood and supported his decision not to continue with psychic work. The toll he felt it had taken on him was too great, he explained, and all he wanted now was a simple, happy life.

Marie agreed with him, but she had a message from the spirit guides to deliver.

"I see that you will continue your work in the future," she told him once.

"Maybe so," Ted replied, "who knows what will happen down the line? But since I've been back home and stayed away from doing any readings, I haven't been bothered by stress, my health is fine, and I wouldn't have it any other way. I'm glad the psychic stuff is gone."

Nineteen

If this counsel or this work be of men,
it will come to nought;
But if it be from God, ye cannot overthrow it.
St. Paul

In January 1984, it all came rushing back. After almost three years of a life without paranormal intrusions, Ted thought he was free of such things, but one brief vision that winter night showed him, once again, that his freedom was an illusion.

In a dreamlike setting, Ted saw a small man, apparently Mexican, dressed in a serape and straw hat, with a little mustache and the dark skin and hair of his race. Nothing really happened in the dream, no message was delivered, only the presence of the strange, silent, intense little man. Thereafter, once or twice a week, the dream recurred.

Ted immediately associated the man with a psychic message Marie had given him in a reading several years before. She told him that a spirit guide named Raphael would be appearing in the future to work with him, and thereafter he did receive contact from such an entity. He wondered if Raphael and the little Mexican man were one and the same, but all he'd had so far was a presence, not a message.

Then the dreams began to change. The Mexican man started giving him information, and Ted had no choice in his sleep but to listen. He was confused by what he heard, for although the message was clear, he didn't understand the reasons behind it. Raphael, as Ted now thought of him, repeatedly delivered one single message.

"You must leave Alabama," he insisted in the dreams.

"You must go to New Mexico."

"Why New Mexico?" Ted asked. He had never thought of going so far away, not since Sun Valley, and certainly not to a place he thought of as empty and arid.

"You must go to Albuquerque," Raphael replied, ignoring the question.

All of this made Ted quite curious, but he did not take the messages seriously and had no intention of actually following Raphael's orders. The dreams weren't upsetting, as so many of his dreams and visions had been in years past. Still, Raphael was a persistent visitor, showing up in dream after dream and urging Ted to move. It even reached a point where the spirit guide named the very date on which Ted should depart for New Mexico.

"I wish Raphael would just give it up," Ted laughed as he told a friend about the recurrent dreams. "There's no way I could take off for New Mexico, even if I wanted to. I've got commitments to my job and the restaurant, and you'd think the spirit world would know about such things."

A few days after this conversation, however, Ted had an accident at work and injured his lower back. He went to a chiropractor for relief from the chronic pain, and the doctor advised several weeks of rest, away from work.

With nothing to do but kill time and relax for those weeks, Ted decided to go ahead and make the trip to New Mexico, now that his curiosity had been piqued. Yet he insisted the whole trip was nothing more than a vacation. He refused to let himself believe that the dream messages were anything serious. All he wanted was to stay off his feet so his back would heal, as the doctor ordered. And if he could also casually check out this place that Raphael harped on, so much the better.

Besides, his long-range plans at work were going nowhere. He had been promised part-ownership in future business expansions, but nothing was moving in that direction. When it looked as though the promise would not be kept, Ted took that as a sign to head out into the world again and look for something better. So he gave the restaurant notice that he was taking a leave of absence, packed up some

belongings, and rode away from Alabama, accompanied by a good friend. Curiously enough, it worked out that Ted left home on the very date that Raphael had given him. He called it a coincidence.

Ted had several distant relatives in New Mexico to visit. While staying with one of them, he had another dream encounter with the persistent Raphael, who brought him yet another command.

"You must submit a business resume," he told Ted, as if it were a normal thing for someone in a sombrero and serape to discuss. And he told Ted the name of a particular company to contact, as well as the exact date for mailing the resume.

By now, Ted was inclined to pay more attention to the little man's advice, and he dutifully sent out the resume on the appointed date. He didn't know whether to feel surprised or not when the company responded, requesting that he come for an interview.

The speed of these events did surprise him, and he agreed to meet with an interviewer. That night, Raphael appeared again, and this time he advised Ted to wait until the following Tuesday to go for his meeting, rather than on the date the company had requested. Determined to follow the scenario to its conclusion, Ted assented and called to reschedule the appointment to fit Raphael's instructions.

When he met with the company's personnel manager, the interview went well, and Ted was told that he would be informed of their decision right away. But several days passed without the anticipated phone call, and he began to feel foolish for acting on the advice of a Spanish figment of his imagination, as he tried to insist. In fact, he had just about given up hope and decided that the dreams were inconsequential after, when Raphael intervened again.

"Don't be discouraged," he told Ted. "You must not leave. You must not return home. You will be contacted and receive the job offer. And you must accept it."

The message was so insistent that Ted reluctantly postponed his departure, giving Raphael one last chance to prove correct. Two more days passed, and still he heard nothing. At last, impatient either to be offered the job or to return to

Alabama, Ted phoned the company. The secretary apologized for the delay and told him that the interviewer had been called away unexpectedly. He would be back in the office on Monday, she explained, and she hoped Ted would be patient a bit longer. The secretary also said that Ted's phone number had been misplaced, making it impossible for her to reach him about the delay.

Monday morning, as promised, Ted received a phone call and an invitation to work, starting that very day. He was elated, having fallen in love with the beautiful surroundings, and he accepted readily.

"Raphael was right," he thought. "This will be a good change. I've been at home too long anyway."

The friend with whom Ted had traveled offered to go back to Alabama and move whatever belongings he might need, to which Ted agreed. A week later, the friend was back with his things, and Ted had notified his employer at the restaurant, explaining that his leave of absence was going to be permanent.

The job worked out well for Ted, and he felt he had made the right decision. Raphael's advice had been sound, but once Ted acted upon it, the little Mexican man disappeared from his dreams. He quickly settled into a new routine and established himself in Albuquerque. He bought a mobile home and set it up in a beautiful park on the desert's edge, relishing the majesty of the Sandia Mountains in the distance.

As part of the changes in his new life, Ted kept quiet about his psychic talents, and for the first nine months, his life went smoothly, with no strange episodes of any sort. In fact, he gave no thought to the paranormal until one day Judy, one of Ted's coworkers, mentioned an unusual event she and her husband had recently witnessed.

"We were on our way out of town for the weekend," she said, "heading toward Estancia. It's just a small, two-lane highway out there. We were driving along in the dark, it was around eight p.m., and then all of a sudden the sky lit up all around us. For a few seconds, we could see the surrounding area light up, just like daylight! Even the interior of the car was filled with light.

"And then as suddenly as it had appeared," Judy continued, "it disappeared. Everything was dark again. We thought that was strange, so my husband Joe and I stopped to see what was going on. We both got out, and I looked up, you know, to see if a plane or helicopter or something was there to justify the bright light. But there was nothing, not even another car coming in either direction."

Ted and the others listened curiously, wondering what she and Joe had seen.

"I guess it was a UFO," Judy concluded. "We didn't see a craft or anything directly, but what else could possibly appear and disappear so quickly? And what else could possibly light up the sky that way?"

"Wow!" Ted said. He had never known anyone who had seen a UFO–except Maya, he suddenly remembered.

Judy's friends listened to the account excitedly and asked many questions about the experience, except for Ted, who said nothing. He was thinking about Maya and the distant object he had seen years before, hovering in the mountain gap above Sun Valley. Maya had directed him there with the assurance that he would witness a UFO, but at the time he couldn't feel certain of the object's real nature.

He had never been convinced that it was a UFO, although Maya insisted that it was. But since she had not been present, he wondered, how could she possibly know? Besides, Ted wasn't even sure he believed that such things existed. After all, the government was constantly exposing the mundane realities behind people's fraudulent claims of UFO sightings. Now, however, he knew that Judy was not pulling a hoax, and he didn't know what to think.

Shortly after this, Ted received a book in the mail from his niece in Alabama. He appreciated her thoughtfulness, but when he looked at the book cover he didn't find it especially appealing. It was called *OUT ON A LIMB* and was written by Shirley MacLaine. His niece, however, soon phoned and asked if the book had arrived.

"I read it," she said enthusiastically, "and you've got to read it, too, Ted."

"Why?" he wondered.

"This is so strange," she replied, "but there's a part I was reading that reminded me of you. Remember the stuff you told us about your years in Sun Valley?"

"Sure, but what stuff, exactly?"

"You'll see," she replied mysteriously. "You just read that book, and then let's talk again after that."

With his curiosity aroused, Ted did begin reading the book, and it soon became clear why his niece had sent it. At one point in the story, MacLaine wrote of an extraterrestrial, a woman named Maya, from a mountainous area in South America.

Ted was astonished. The description of MacLaine's Maya matched exactly with the young, beautiful woman he had known and cared for so deeply in Sun Valley. Everything he read there about her–the mannerisms, the conversations, the mysteries–seemed the same as with his Maya, and even some of the events in *OUT ON A LIMB* felt strangely familiar.

Ted had certainly never thought of Maya as any sort of alien or extraterrestrial, but simply as a very unusual person from whom he'd learned important things, a cherished friend. This book, however, made him look back on those months with Maya and question the whole situation more carefully.

How could he have been so close to her and yet have known nothing about her, not even her last name? Why had there been no record of her employment in the personnel office, and what could he really believe of her fantastic description of the place and the way her people supposedly lived?

He longed to contact Shirley MacLaine and tell her that he, too, had known this Maya and had been deeply affected by their relationship. It was an overwhelming revelation. Ted phoned his niece immediately, and they discussed all the details he had shared with her long ago. He also phoned Marie, who was intrigued by Ted's possible discovery about Maya.

"I don't pay much attention to UFOs and all that," Marie said, "but it's an amazing coincident, to say the least."

"No, I don't think it is," Ted replied, "not a coincidence,

Marie. I've remembered something else, something that happened back in Atlanta, and maybe you'll recall my talking about it then. There was this guy, Mark, who was a friend of some people I knew, so I got to know him a little bit, too. Mark had an alcohol problem back then, and one time when he just disappeared on a drunk for a few days, his friends asked me to use my psychic powers to find him."

"This sounds familiar, all right," Marie said, "but I just can't remember the details of what happened."

"Well, I concentrated and got an image of a seedy old motel across town, so I drove over there," Ted continued, "and sure enough, Mark was there. He'd been doing some nonstop drinking and was in really bad shape. I finally got him sober enough to talk about his problems, and that's when he told me. About this woman he was in love with, a woman he met out in west Texas, who was beautiful, golden-tanned, wonderful. A woman named Maya. He described her exactly like my Maya, and I just thought it was some weird coincidence. I mean, how many Mayas can there be, for pete's sake? She–my Maya–was just too unique for me to believe there could really be more of her, like copies or something. But now there's MacLaine's Maya, and I don't know what the heck is going on with this."

Marie had no answer, nor did anyone else. There was no one in Albuquerque to whom he could talk about this personal revelation. Only those he had told about Maya long ago, he felt, would have believed him and realize what a shock *OUT ON A LIMB* had given him. He certainly didn't want any of his new friends, to whom he was plain ordinary Ted, to think he was crazy or making up tall tales after reading the book. So he kept it all inside. No matter how much he found himself wondering about UFOs and extraterrestrials after that, he did not share his private thoughts.

The year passed outwardly in a normal fashion, then, until an incident in 1985 when he was visited by friends from Alabama. Several days into their stay, Ted woke up at half past three a.m. with his heart racing. Getting quietly out of bed, he looked around the mobile home for any sign of something wrong. All his guests were sleeping peacefully, but Ted

had a feeling that something was outside. Or someone.

He went out onto the patio, watching. In the still night he could see highway traffic off in the distance, and then he glanced up. Above him was an oval-shaped patch of black, outlined against the starry sky. There was no sound, and no object was apparent, just a perfect blackness where the stars were blotted out. He thought it was strange, so he went back inside and woke up one of his friends, asking him to come see the odd phenomenon. But by the time they returned to the patio, the oval patch had disappeared and the sky looked completely normal. For some reason, the sight had made Ted very nervous, so he lit a cigarette and talked for a while, repeating to his friend the details of the image.

A couple of months passed uneventfully, as the autumn nights grew chilly. Then once again, Ted awoke in the middle of the night and bolted upright in the bed, his heart racing wildly. Instinctively he let out a roaring scream, dashed up, and raced out onto the patio, shaking uncontrollably.

One of the neighbors, awakened by the scream, turned on a light and came outside, looking around anxiously.

"What's wrong?" he called out. "Are you okay?"

Still shaking, Ted replied with a nervous nod, "Yeah, I just had a nightmare. I'm sorry I bothered you."

He suddenly felt very cold, and then realizing he was wearing only his underwear, Ted hurried back indoors. But he couldn't calm down, and his fright was so strong that he sat up the rest of the night, pacing and smoking, until daylight dawned.

And slowly he began to remember parts of the nightmare, although by that time he was not sure that he had really been asleep when it happened. For he clearly recalled being taken somewhere, up above the mobile home, and looking down on it below. He had felt conscious, and the sight looked real. He remembered moving rapidly from that spot and watching lights flying past him for a brief time before coming to a stop.

At that point, Ted was looking down on a barren terrain in which everything blended together in a dull yellowish-tan color. He saw sagebrush, and then he saw a large compound surrounded by a high wall. Within the wall were a group of

people, herded together like cattle in a small corral. Drawing closer, Ted saw a woman and a young boy sitting together in the crowded space, totally immobile. As he moved even closer, he felt that he could have reached out and touched them. He suddenly wanted to shake them awake, although he didn't know why.

He turned to someone he could not see and said, "You can't do this to my people! You're treating them just like cattle!"

"You treat cattle this way," the unknown person replied. "Why can't we treat humans like this?"

The next thing Ted remembered was screaming in hysterics and then waking up back in bed. Now, sitting nervously on the patio in the morning sun and trying to make sense of these memories, Ted also felt that he had been to another area within the compound, one that was underground. And whatever he had seen going on with the humans reminded him of cattle, that was clear. For days afterward, he experienced feelings of great anger and fear. He couldn't sleep well and had to resort again, after several years, to a sedative that would let him rest and keep functioning at work.

Ted worried about slipping back into the stressed-out condition that had led to his collapse in Atlanta. He was also afraid that the spirit world was once again intent upon disturbing him and interfering with the normal, happy life he had made for himself in Albuquerque. And he desperately did not want that to happen.

As the next few months passed without further incident, however, Ted slowly began to relax, sleeping better again, thanking the higher powers for his return to a sane, uncomplicated life. There were no more strange shapes in the sky, and eventually the frightening memories of the compound and the people in the corral faded away, too. With persistent faith, he told himself he was free from the paranormal.

Somewhere, in another dimension, perhaps, the spirits must have been amused. Looking down on Ted clinging to a desperate belief that he could live his life on everyday terms, they must have wondered how long he could delude himself with such ideas. It did not matter that Ted had given up the

spiritualist group and his psychic readings, that he kept his unusual talents a secret from those around him. When the spirits were ready to continue their plans for him, Ted learned he had no choice but to follow.

Their return was signaled by a visionary dream Ted had in January 1986. As soon as the dream ended, he awoke with clear memory of the details. He had been traveling along the interstate when he saw a road sign that read, "Amarillo, Texas." That was all he recalled, but instinctively he knew that the message was prophetic. The forces that had sent Raphael, with his urgings toward New Mexico, were up to their old tricks, Ted realized. He wondered why they took such an interest in his whereabouts, and he had never understood the significance of his move to Albuquerque. But the message on the road sign was clear. He would be moving to Amarillo, although he had no indication of when this would happen.

The answer came a few weeks later. His supervisor called Ted into the office and told him that the company had just purchased several facilities in Texas. A rush of exhilaration ran through Ted as he realized what was coming next.

"One of our new offices is in Amarillo," the supervisor said, "and they're going to need a sharp credit manager. It'll be a promotion for you, of course, with a good raise, and we'll pay moving expenses if you take the position."

"All right," Ted replied, sensing that it would do no good to resist.

Soon he made arrangements for his mobile home to be moved, and as he drove out of New Mexico and into Texas he saw a road sign identical to the one he'd been shown weeks before. The dream, as so many others had done, proved accurate.

Still, he refused to be goaded back into an interest in the psychic world. All his concentration went to the new job and settling down in Amarillo. Later that year, however, he was surprised by a phone call from Frank, an old friend who was also a psychic. Ted had met him back in Georgia when his spiritualist work was at its height.

"Guess what?" Frank began. "A good friend of mine lives

in Amarillo now, and I'm down here visiting her. Since you and I haven't seen each other in several years, what do you say I come over and spend some time with you while I'm in the area?"

Ted agreed, and Frank arrived soon after for a visit. Three months later, he phoned again.

"There are a lot of people I've met here," he told him, "who would really like to have psychic readings, but there's no one around to do it. Why don't you help out?"

Before that moment, Ted had no intention of ever taking up spiritualist work again, but impulsively he agreed to Frank's request.

"It's been a long time," he said, "but if you think these people really need help, I guess I could try."

He couldn't believe he was saying that, yet somewhere inside he felt that resistance would be futile.

The demand for readings in the area was great, and it grew even more once he began working on a weekly basis and his reputation for accuracy spread. He met quite a few new people, giving whatever help he could, and as time passed he grew more comfortable with the work.

But there were some problems, and plenty of skeptics who did their best to undercut Ted's influence. Such things were annoying, but it wasn't until repercussions from one of his readings exploded that he came to regret his involvement.

When a certain woman came to him, asking about her marital troubles, Ted dutifully described to her the visions he received from spirit guides. This time they were apparently too specific, for the woman deduced enough from the reading to catch her husband in an illicit affair. When the husband found out that the psychic reading had exposed him, he came after Ted in a vengeful spirit.

The situation got so testy that Ted decided to forego more readings, rueful that he had let himself get back into the work in the first place. Some of the people wanted his help, but many more were intent upon demeaning his abilities and attacking his reputation. The headaches just weren't worth it, he told himself, determined to give it up again and focus on his own happiness.

It was not to be, of course, not with the persistence of Ted's guides. And to make sure he got the message, they demanded his attention in a powerful way.

In the middle of the night, awake but in an altered mental state, he found himself transported to an unknown location, accompanied on either side by two men whose features were unclear to him. When he came to full awareness, Ted was standing between the men in a large room, well-lit without any apparent light source. Across the room stood a long table with a row of empty chairs behind it.

A door opened on the left, and five strange men marched out in single file, stepping in unison. The man at the head of the line was Caucasian with light brown hair, the second man had a dark complexion, and the other three were of various races. Each wore a close-fitting shirt with a high collar, reminiscent of outdated Nehru jackets. Completely disoriented, Ted struggled to recognize them, but no one looked familiar.

The men marched up silently behind the table. The leader stopped at the center chair while the others placed themselves beside him, two on each side. Then they all made a short bow in Ted's direction and took their seats. Even in his dazed condition, Ted was surprised by the men's respectful greeting.

As if on cue, the two men beside Ted propelled him forward until the three of them stood close to the table and the mysterious council.

"Listen carefully," the central figure said, gazing intently into Ted's eyes. "You must stop trying to please people and to gain their validation of your work. We have brought you here to tell you to cease your concerns, for these feelings are interfering with your proper direction.

"You must not concern yourself with what other people think. You are here to do very important work. This overconcern with the opinions of others is holding back your progress."

Ted wanted to respond, but he was unable to move or speak, held firmly in the man's steady gaze.

"Always remember that the people who need to hear your message will hear it," the leader continued. "Those who

do not hear must not concern you. There will never be enough evidence or proof to convince them, at any rate, for they will always find a way to discredit it or justify it away. Do your work, and all will be well, regardless of those and their attitudes."

Ted's immediate next awareness was of sitting up in his bed, and it was morning. He remembered everything, and for the first time in months he had a feeling of security and relief. Whether the nighttime event had been real or a dream, Ted accepted the message as valid. The spirits knew of his doubts, and they had given him all the reassurance he needed. With such loving, caring forces on his side, he felt confident to carry on with the readings again.

Soon after that, just when things had settled down, a different sort of disruption came along. At work, there were rumors of coming changes which did not make Ted feel very secure. He started looking for other job possibilities, just in case the rumors turned out to be true. Before anything developed, however, he had another visionary dream, similar to the one he had seen before the move to Amarillo.

In this dream, Ted saw himself driving around a different city, looking for a place to set up his mobile home. He found one particular site that looked inviting, but he could not tell exactly where he was. When he awoke and cleared his thoughts, however, he suddenly realized that the city he was shown was Shreveport, Louisiana.

"Good Lord!" he thought, appalled by the vision. "I can't imagine myself moving to Shreveport! I'd rather go back to New Mexico, or maybe up to Denver, anywhere but Louisiana. What on earth could pull me to Shreveport?"

Part Five

The Light

Speak the truth and shame the Devil.
Rabelais

The devil is an angel too.
Unamuno

Twenty

Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.
St. Paul

"The dream turned out to be accurate, of course," Ted said, wrapping up his final interview with Barbara Bartholic. "The Amarillo office closed in June 1988, and the only job offer I received after weeks of hunting was in Shreveport."

"So you moved the mobile home..." Barbara started to say.

"Right to the very place I had seen in the dream," Ted finished, nodding. "And you know the rest of it, Barb, the bedroom intrusions, the neighborhood abduction, the business with Marie and Amelia and the others. Do you think I'm crazy? That we're all crazy, or what? It would be a relief to think so, I'll tell you that."

"No, I'm afraid you're not crazy," she laughed. "If you are, then I've got between three and four hundred other crazy people telling me some very similar things. Not necessarily such amazing encounters as you've had with ghost manifestations, perhaps. But the details you've recalled concerning possible alien presences, yes, there are possible correlations with the patterns I'm seeing in other abduction reports."

Ted glanced out the window for a moment at the duck pond and quiet rural acreage behind Barbara's home in northern Oklahoma. On the long drive from Shreveport to Barbara's Ted had plenty of time to think about his paranormal experiences and to ponder on the mysterious forces behind them. And none was more mystifying than his recent encounters with so-called aliens.

"It's very confusing," he said. "I've told you all that I've consciously remembered, but I know a lot more is involved in all this. I want to know everything that has happened to me, Barbara, I think I deserve to know the truth. That's why I'm here. If there is a chance that regressive hypnosis will help me uncover anything, I want to try it."

"Fine," Barbara agreed. "We'll try to find out if your assumption that these may have been ET encounters is right. I feel that the symptoms you've described, the sleep deprivation, reliance on sedatives, your fear of being alone at night, are like post-traumatic stress symptoms, and they indicate a real event of some nature has occurred to cause them. We can use hypnosis as a tool and try to uncover whatever experiences may be suppressed in your subconscious, but please be aware that we may not find anything."

"I understand that," Ted nodded.

"And if you do uncover something," Barbara cautioned, "I must tell you that the knowledge may cause a permanent change in your life. It's like stepping into a different world, one that alters and widens your concept of reality, Ted, and you just can't turn around and step back over that threshold once you've crossed it. Are you sure that you're prepared for that?"

"Yes, I think so," Ted said. "I'd be lying if I said I wasn't apprehensive, but I don't know any other way I can get at the truth. Let's give it a try."

When they settled down for the session later that evening, Ted told Barbara that he wanted to explore his memories of the night in Atlanta when his bedroom filled with fog. That night had always disturbed him, so Barbara led him to a light trance state and regressed him back to the experience. He recalled the details with great clarity, going through all the fright and confusion once again, but no new information emerged.

Barbara then suggested to Ted that he might explore some other situation. From her years of regression work, she had learned to trust the subject's unconscious to yield whatever information it felt would be useful.

"Tell me if your mind will give you a thought of another

experience," she suggested. "It doesn't have to do with the one we've looked at now, just any experience that is significant."

Ted paused for a few minutes before speaking again.

"I remember when I was a little boy," he began, "and I used to lie on the floor in front of my grandmother's fireplace, sucking a bottle. It felt very warm and comfortable and secure. I used to take my finger and twist it in my hair. My grandmother would be in the kitchen, and I'd lie in front of the fireplace, very quietly."

"Is there something significant here we should look at?" Barbara asked.

"Hmm, I don't think so," Ted said. "But something else is coming into my mind. I'm still on the farm, but I'm a little older. Oh! I'm older, and I'm living with my mom and dad and my brother. We're not at my grandmother's house, we're at one of her tenant houses which is across the field a ways."

Ted suddenly winced. "Ooh!" he said, "I don't know what that is! I'm walking from my grandmother's house over to our house. I see this thing, I'm looking at the bottom of something, and it's kind of dark underneath. But around the edges it's kind of illuminated. It almost looks like it's on fire."

He paused momentarily, puzzled. "I don't know what happens after that," he murmured.

"How old are you when this happens?"

"I don't know for sure, but I want to say eight. I think I'm eight years old."

"Start walking from the moment before you see this thing," Barbara suggested, deepening his level of trance. "Tell me what the day is like. Is it daytime?"

"I'm looking up at the sun," Ted began, "but it wasn't really the sun."

Deep in a trance state, he let the recollections unfold, bringing forth images of a morning forty years earlier. As Barbara guided him through the process, Ted regressed to the age of eight and related the following information, presented here in a more coherent form than it had as it emerged in his memory, from an experience he never suspected lay buried within him. As Ted and Barbara realized, many of the details

bore a close resemblance to the "Karly Kane" story.

The day was cloudy and overcast, but little Teddy didn't mind. He loved playing alone, roaming through the cotton fields and chasing the small animals he flushed from cover. His bare feet scuffed along, raising dusty clouds behind him. The sky grew darker, and Teddy wondered if a storm might be coming. Maybe he should get back home, he thought, turning away from the open fields and heading for the faded gray house beyond the farmland.

As he walked along, something made him look up. A light high above him shone down, and Teddy had to shield his eyes from the blinding radiance.

"That's not the sun, is it?" he wondered. But before he could go further, he felt himself rising from the ground, unable to move, floating up toward the source of the strange light.

An image began to emerge from the white brilliance, the image of a grating or grillwork. As he approached it, Teddy felt himself pass right through, like smoke through a picket fence, and his mind blanked out.

When he was once again aware of his surroundings, Teddy saw that he was in a strange room, and he was not alone.

"I just saw an ugly face," Ted told Barbara in a whisper. "It looked chalky white. The head almost looked like it was plastic, a mask. It had kind of an angular chin, coming down in a V-shape, and curved slightly. There are two dark holes for the eyes. They look more like holes than anything else, like it's just a void."

Two small, gray beings stood watching Teddy.

"Who are you?" he asked, looking around in confusion. "Where am I?"

The beings made no sound in response, but then he began to hear them in his mind. They told him not to speak aloud, that it was not necessary.

"Talk to us mentally," they communicated, but they would not answer his questions.

The beings guided him over to a small sitting area and placed him beside a window. Looking through it, Teddy became very

alarmed. He could see his grandmother's house below him, but then whatever he was inside began to turn and move upward rapidly, away from the farm below.

Bright, multicolored lights flashed by, and he felt as if he were moving at great speed. The lights disappeared, and all Teddy could see out the window was total darkness. Fascinated, he watched for a while, and then he spotted something in the distance. It was a round, pea-shaped thing that appeared to be getting larger. Before long, he realized that the round thing was not really growing, but that he was approaching closer to it. It was a dark, gray-green metallic orb, with spikes protruding from various angles.

"Do you remember watching old World War II movies, and those great big explosive mines that were in the ocean? Ted asked. "I keep seeing something that looks like that, only huge, kind of a dark color, and I don't see any windows. But there are little things sticking out on it."

"Where is this located?" Barbara asked.

"I don't know," Ted replied.

Inside the moving craft, Teddy watched the approach to the spiky orb, which he could now tell was of enormous size. He noticed tiny objects around the sphere, flying in and out of the tips of the spikes. Teddy drew nearer until at last he could discern what these objects were: metallic ships entering the projections. And he saw that the craft he was in was now maneuvering to enter one of those openings.

Once inside the huge sphere, the craft carrying Teddy came to rest on a gigantic platform. He was led out by the two gray beings, into what seemed to be the central part of the strange environment. The top of the structure was so far above him that he couldn't even see it. Beams of light stretched from point to point, and he watched as other creatures like the ones with him traversed the light beams as if they were walkways.

Propelled forward by his companions, Teddy walked down a long hall, noticing the luxuriantly plush carpeting beneath his bare feet. They came to a door or opening, and he was led inside. Everything was so quiet that Teddy felt frightened. The stillness was sepulchral, and as he looked around he sensed that there was no

love, no emotion there, only the deathly silence. The gray beings were cold, unsmiling, and uncommunicative.

The little room reminded Teddy of a doctor's office, filled with cabinets, counters, and strange machinery. In the middle of the room stood a shiny metallic plate, taller than he was, suspended a few inches above the floor. It had a small shelf or foot support upon which the beings placed him, with his back against the cold metal plate. It was hard for him to see clearly in this room, for it was lit only by a soft, hazy, bluish ambience that had no discernible source.

Someone else entered the room, a woman with burgundy red hair, bluntly cut, with bangs. Her face was rouged and her lips darkly painted. She wore a white lab coat, as if she were a doctor's assistant.

"Remove your clothes," she told him mentally.

"No," Teddy thought back at her. "I don't want to."

Ignoring his protests, the woman and the gray beings forcibly undressed him, and then she walked over to a counter top area where many lights pulsated. Teddy saw large screens above the counter and other devices he couldn't identify. The woman pushed some buttons or switches or something, Teddy wasn't really sure, and then the metal plate against which he was standing began to change colors.

"The wall's kind of lit up behind me," Ted told Barbara. "I've got the feeling they're across the room looking at me. It looks like an X-ray and they can see through me. Or maybe what's on the wall behind me is telling them something. The wall is funny behind me, and these eyes are watching from across the room. They're looking at me, they're talking about what they're seeing on the wall. It has to do with me."

He paused, concentrating on his interior images.

"They've done something to me," he resumed, "and they're seeing, they're looking to see how it is."

What had seemed solid metal behind him now seemed more like a window through which colored lights shone. Teddy saw that on the screens above the counter a series of images appeared. At first he recognized images of his bone structure, and then the image changed to show blood vessels. Next he could make out what

appeared to be his internal organs, and as each image changed, it seemed this device was recording absolutely everything about his body. It was even counting the number of hairs on his head.

Teddy was startled when the plate against which he stood suddenly moved, tilting slowly back until it was horizontal, like a table. He raised his head and saw the gray beings approach. They carried a strange device that reminded him of headphones, which they positioned on his head so that it covered his ears. Noise came from the device, puzzling at first but growing painful as it continued. He didn't like this noise, he wanted the headphones off his head, and he wanted to get out of that office and away from these beings.

The woman returned from the counter area with a glass in her hand. It was filled with a green liquid, and Teddy was amazed by the way the liquid glowed in the dimly lit room.

"Drink it," she communicated, holding out the glass.

"No," Teddy shook his head. "I want to go home."

"Drink it now," she insisted, "or you cannot go home. If you want to go home, you must mind me as you do your mother."

"You're not my mother," he thought back at her, but she was unmoved.

"After you drink this," she continued, "you can go home."

No emotion came from the woman, but Teddy was scared into submission. Without another word, he took the glass and drank the glowing liquid. Immediately he became sick, nauseated, and pain flared up as if his insides were on fire. He lay back on the table, growing sicker, until he vomited. Tendrils of green liquid dribbled down his mouth and chin, still glowing, but at least he no longer felt ill.

And then, as if he were standing a few feet away from the table, Teddy could see his body lying there motionless.

"Am I dead?" he wondered.

Something cloudy and formless began to rise up from the small body. Teddy was amazed as he watched this mass slowly coalesce into a beautiful image of himself, and he saw that it was attached by a bottom tendril to drops of the green liquid on his face.

"It's my soul!" he thought in amazement.

The miniature image turned toward the red-headed woman and looked at her. Teddy could feel great emotion coming from this form. He felt it was showing pure love and total, instant forgiveness

toward her, although he didn't understand why.

The woman went to the counter for a black, rectangular box, which she carried back over to the table where Teddy's body lay. With a single motion, she turned his body over and placed the black box on the shoulder area. Wires were then attached to the box, and the woman somehow activated it. The little spirit image was slowly sucked into the box, which the woman then removed and replaced on the counter.

Next, she pulled down an instrument from the ceiling and turned it on.

"I see what looks like a dentist's drill," Ted described for Barbara, "kind of on a hook, expanding. They're using something like this, working on my head, the lower neck."

"Can you describe this action?" Barbara asked.

"They do something on both sides of the back of my neck, the lower part," Ted explained. "I don't like them doing that. That's when things started happening in my mind, when I see them doing that."

"What was happening in your head?"

"What I didn't like was forgetting things," Ted groped for the words to explain the sensation. "I wasn't remembering very well."

Teddy saw a thin beam of light at the tip of the instrument, watching as the woman moved it down to the back of his neck. With the light beam she swiftly severed the head from the body and placed it in a basket-sized container on the floor. The table tilted again slightly, allowing the blood from the body to flow into a vat.

Teddy's mind went completely blank. When he was next aware, he could hear a noise like a large resuscitator in the distance. And he was looking down on row after row of short tubs or containers.

"Give me all the impressions of where you are now," Barbara directed.

"This room's a lot bigger," Ted said, "and I can see lockers, like in a gymnasium. There seem to be lockers all the way around the walls, everywhere."

The tubs pulsated to the rhythm of the noise, and he could see that they were filled with dark red liquid in which chunks of fleshy tissue floated. The sides of the tubs appeared to be made of cowhide. At the end of each tub, he saw something that reminded him of the genitals of a cow, and as he watched, one of these area opened, releasing a placenta-like bubble of dark red substance.

The gray beings picked up this mass and carried it over to a sink-type receptacle. They turned on a water outlet and gently washed the bubble. When they turned back around, Teddy could see that they held a tiny baby.

"Describe these lockers, please, Ted," Barbara requested.

"They're not lockers," he replied, becoming more agitated with each word. "They're compartments, they'll open, and there's something in all of those."

"What's in there?" Barbara asked.

"I can't look," he whispered, breathing rapidly. "Oh! Oh! No! I want up!"

Ted fought to escape from the couch, panicked by the vision of the compartments. It was all Barbara could do to keep him subdued as she worked to soothe his terror and return him to more control.

"Lie down, Ted," she murmured, "and relax. Relax. It's okay, you can cry. It's all right."

One of the beings went over to a short cabinet in a locker area and opened the door, placing the baby inside. The other being activated a control on the locker, and a few minutes later opened the door again. It rolled out what looked like a small wind-tunnel contraption. Within it was a tray, and on the tray Teddy saw a body identical to his, completely naked.

The beings moved this body over to the tilted table, which now stood empty, and placed it on the metal surface. Then the woman brought back the black box and set it on the body's chest. Teddy could not see exactly what was done at that point, but he could see the naked body suddenly begin to jerk in short spasms. After that, the chest started to rise and fall, as if the body was now breathing.

The woman removed the black box, replacing it on the counter. She and her gray helpers next inserted long, needle-like instruments

into the bottom of each foot, the chest, and the back and top of the head.

"They do a lot of things," Ted told Barbara, as he regained his composure. "They stuck something in my feet, up closer to the toes."

"What was put in there?" she asked.

"I don't know," he replied, "but I'm being told it will make me big and strong. And they put some kind of drops in my eyes."

"What was the purpose for that?"

"I don't know. My eyes were hurting like they're real dry and irritated. Somebody keeps telling me that I'll be all right, they'll be finished in a minute and that I can go home."

One of the grays then brought the woman the headphone device. She placed it on the body and activated the counter equipment once again.

"I have remembrance!" Teddy thought, "I have feelings again!"

A moment before he had felt nothing and known nothing, but now he was aware of who he was. He remembered everything he had thought and felt when he was in his original body, and with a surge of emotion he mentally cried out that he wanted to go home.

But there was more for him to endure. The grays helped him up from the table–he was now clearly back in a body, the body they had created and activated–and led him out to another room. Waiting for him there was a different person, a man dressed in a purple suit and long cape, tall and skinny, more human-looking than the others. His skin was almost an orangish-white, a melon color, and his eyes looked strange because there were no eyebrows above them. His dark hair, which made a sharp widow's peak on his forehead, looked unnatural, as if it were painted on his head.

The tall man jerked Teddy up impatiently and seemed to have a nasty disposition that made the boy very uncomfortable. But before anything else could happen, another man entered the room. This one looked totally human, with kind eyes and short, blond hair. He wore blousy, old-fashioned clothes of emerald green trimmed in gold and white.

The blond man said something to the bad-tempered man that

Teddy could not understand, but he got the impression they were arguing about him. Then the dark-haired man angrily stomped his foot, whirled around, and left the room. The blond man squatted down beside Teddy and put his arm around the little boy's shoulder. His gentle, soothing, almost sensual actions calmed Teddy's fears.

The man began to explain what had been going on, telling Teddy about the lockers and the procedures that had been performed. Speaking as if the child were an adult, the man told him that he would be able instantly to absorb this information. He explained that there were periodic changes in the evolutionary process of the original Teddy, and that from time to time, for different reasons, such a switching-out procedure would be necessary for Teddy to fulfill his purpose here. He told the boy that he would be visited occasionally to make sure everything was progressing as it should, for the man was studying the beginnings of a new approach to something Teddy couldn't really comprehend.

He also told Teddy that something had been done to his mother, and that the genealogical structure of both his parents had been used along with something else. Teddy understood that he was part of an experiment for the continuity of life, in some way involved with the final stages of growth. When the explanation was finished, the blond man took Teddy's hand and led him through a doorway into a large auditorium area.

They stood together on a stage, and as Teddy looked out at the crowd of beings in the room, he saw many more of the gray people. There were also numerous animals present among them, including some creatures he had never seen before. They were all gathered there as an audience, waiting and watching, Teddy thought, with their attention focused on him.

From the opposite side of the stage, Teddy saw the dark-haired man walk out leading two other young children, a boy and a girl, who were also naked. The red-headed woman also arrived, and she took the two children from the man and brought them over to where Teddy and his companion stood.

The blond man picked up Teddy in his arms and held him out for the audience to observe, and then he did the same thing with the other two children.

"Everybody, this group of people that was watching,' Ted

said, "it's like they approve it. I don't know what that means. They were pleased with us for some reason."

"What did you say this area looks like?" Barbara asked.

"It's an auditorium," he repeated. "There's a bunch of people there, and a lot of animals. I don't know what some of these things are. I see some tall, hairy creatures like a Bigfoot, and some horrible things that look like they're half-human, half-ant or half-cockroach. Those praying-mantis type things are big and have some almost human features. Strange reddish-brown, worm-like creatures, and some furry brown fat ones, even some that look like a mix of human and monkey. And all of them have their eyes on us."

The blond man began to address the audience, talking about future generations. On a screen behind them, images flashed showing the 'before' and the 'after' products of the procedure Teddy had endured.

"See," the man said proudly, "these are just like the original children."

He explained to the audience that these children were the beginnings of products of future generations on earth.

Ted's chest began heaving again, and his agitation increased.

"What is coming into your mind now?" Barbara asked.

"The things he's saying, something about our creation," Ted managed to speak. "Oooh!" he suddenly wailed, in long, mournful cries of fear and anger. Barbara tried to calm him again, but he was too frightened to listen.

"I saw that locker door again!" he cried in anguish, shaking uncontrollably.

"It's okay, don't be afraid now," Barbara encouraged soothingly, while Ted gripped at the couch and fought against the spasms wracking his body.

"I know what's in there," he whispered, trembling. "I know what's in there. And that's what I don't like. There's another one of me in there. Oh! Oh! I don't want to do it any more! I want to stop!"

His eyes flew open and he stared around in panic. No

matter how much he wanted to block the memories, they kept coming.

"They put me in there and took it out," he whimpered, "they changed it. There's another one of me in there."

Tears streamed down his face, and the spasms gradually ebbed away.

"It's fine, it's okay," Barbara repeated. "You let that out, you're fine now. You'll feel better now that you've faced it."

"I wasn't produced in my mother," Ted said, crying again. "I know. I saw it. There's more than one of me, looks just like me."

"Did they all have your kindness and your generous spirit?" Barbara asked. "Did they have your kind of soul?"

"I don't know, I don't know," Ted cried out, suddenly loud and even more terrified. "I want to get up!"

Twenty-One

To conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom.
Russell

Barbara held on, steadying Ted until his fear subsided. She had seen this before, the abreaction or release of repressed emotion, that sometimes erupted when an abductee consciously relived a situation of intense trauma. When Ted had gone through the frightening abduction at eight years old, he had been unable to express his fears, but now, with Barbara's comforting support, he felt safe enough to let it all out.

Once he was calmer, Barbara lay him back on the couch and gently brought him forward in time and out of the trance. As he rested, Ted thought about the Karly Kane story, which for him now had a new significance.

"I think that story was about this experience,"he told Barbara. "When I remembered being in the auditorium, I saw a whole group of little beings dressed in blue outfits, just like the choir of children that Karly heard singing. I showed my niece that story one time, and she said it seemed like Karly died. But I said no, he didn't die, he came back. I guess she was right, though."

"How do you feel now, about what the regression revealed?

"There were so many images that I wasn't able to tell you everything I saw. Sometimes I was too scared to look, and other times everything was so strange and confusing that I didn't know what to think."

"If I understood you correctly, you told me that the aliens

made a duplicate body, right?" Barbara asked, and Ted nodded. "So that when, for whatever reason, they took your soul and put it in that cloned body, your mother never knew there was any difference. Ted, why did this terrify you so much?"

"My rational mind was trying to accept this," he replied. "It sounds so hideous and horrible. I felt like I knew I was being destroyed, but also given new life. I felt both sensations, the terror of my destruction and the joy of living again, dual emotions."

"Was there any change in your personality or health after that?"

"I was sick for a long time," Ted said. "Mother complained because I got some childhood diseases that I had already had before. And she said that for weeks I was in pain. I told her that my insides felt like they were burning up, and she used to soak me in a cool tub. When I was in school after that, I didn't do very well for a while. I wanted to stay away from the other children."

He stopped, overwhelmed by the trauma of his memories.

"I just now realize why my mother had reacted to me the way she did at times," he continued sadly. "There were occasions when she seemed uncomfortable if I touched her, as if it made her a bit edgy. I think, maybe, she knew on some level that I had changed."

"It's probably the buried knowledge about this," Barbara mused. "She has no idea why she was affected that way."

She had seen many times before these situations in personal relationships in the lives of abductees who suffered from unknown sources of stress, and Ted's situation fit that pattern. But it was no consolation to him, knowing that others had been hurt this way, too.

"Something else just triggered another memory from that same time," he said. "It was a stormy day, and when I came back from wherever I had gone, I wasn't on the road. I was left way out in the field, I don't know where I'd been, and I was running. God, this is almost unbearable. I was trying to get home because something horrible had happened. I reached the back porch just as a tornado hit. It moved the house off the foundation, and my mother and brother were

inside trying to open the door to let me in because I was screaming."

"And the rest of your family remembers this?" Barbara asked.

"Absolutely," he nodded. "The tornado pulled up a small apple tree and socked it right into the back door where I was standing. Limbs went through the window and everywhere, but not one of them touched me. And my uncle, who was outside looking for me for a long time, said that when the tornado came, he could see lots of different colored lights or glowing places inside the funnel. Guess we know what that was now."

In the days after he returned to Shreveport, images of his death and the cloned body replayed through Ted's mind incessantly. Over and over, he relived the pain of his separation from the body, his helpless joy at being returned to life, and the shock of knowing he was someone's experiment. He raged against the aliens' deceptions, and he felt even more betrayed by the spirit world he had always trusted.

Metaphysical philosophy did not prepare him for such things, his spirit guides never mentioned any alien involvement in his life, and so Ted had gone along in total ignorance of the forces around him.

"I've been praying constantly since I left your house last Sunday," he wrote Barbara shortly after the regression. "These prayers have been the one thing that's holding me together and helping me keep my sanity.

"I cannot for the life of me believe what I experienced in the regression was real. It has to be an illusion or my imagination. This is what I keep trying to tell myself. But deep within my being I know the truth. We have only to look at the cattle mutilations, the crop circles, all the actual photos and video tapes, the eyewitnesses and regressed abductees to know that this horror has entered into our physical dimension and is as real as we are.

"In my prayers," Ted continued, "I have openly confessed to God that I have been molded, shaped and engineered to be the 'Light Worker' they wanted me to be. I have been in preparation for forty years to do just what I've been doing,

which is fascinating and mystifying people with my remarkable psychic abilities. Through psychic readings, I have led people away from the Christ consciousness into a world of metaphysical beliefs and ufology. I overpowered people mentally and left them wide open to invite this invading nightmare into their lives. And I did it all in the illusion and deception that I was really and truly helping my fellow man grow spiritually wiser through my so-called gift."

Ted's outrage was evident, and so was his determination to fight against the perpetrators of such intrusions.

"So now I've asked God," he wrote, "to take this ability they have engineered within me and use it against them, to reveal their plans and secrets. May God give us the strength and power to overcome their evil.

"That demonstration of their cloning abilities which I witnessed was a demonstration by the blond man that he could control life, in the past, present, and future. With this ability, the aliens can now prey upon *homo sapiens'* most vulnerable point, our emotions of love for each other. To entice and manipulate us when they come to the earth plane, they can not only offer us everlasting life, but they can bring our departed loved ones back from the grave, through cloning. What greater weapon would they need to bring us to our knees? We would bow to them as gods and worship them."

Barbara received another letter a few days later, about an experience or vision which had just happened to Ted.

"I've been so full of anger, rage, disappointment, and hurt at what these aliens have done to me," he wrote. "I wanted to know why, for what purpose, I was given the life of some other being. It goes against everything I believed in.

"These were my thoughts and fears shortly after the regression. At that time I wasn't being given any answers to these questions. Instead, I was shown other things, in the form of images I now feel were probably decoys to divert my attention. These aliens are very clever, they know all the tricks.

"As I was driving back from lunch today," the letter continued, "I suddenly saw in my mind, clear as day, a UFO approaching Shreveport, so enormous in size that I felt it

could easily hold thousands of people. It was so huge that it blacked out the sky as it moved over the city. It looked totally round with hundreds of small windows.

"And as I viewed this craft, I suddenly had a feeling of warmth and security within me, as if I were being given a message that something of this nature would occur and that it was coming for our protection. But as soon as it vanished from my mind, my anger and pain returned. I screamed at them as I drove and told them that I would no longer be deceived by this kind of trickery. After what I'd experienced in the regression, I knew that it would take more than images such as this to convince me that their intentions were honorable."

Ted's trust in the visions of the spirit world was shattered, and he would take nothing on faith now when it came to UFOs and their occupants. What he wanted was the truth.

The memories Ted had accessed through regressive hypnosis taught him several things. First, it was clear that some of his conscious recollections of strange events might be deceptive. The disparity between the Karly Kane story and what he had remembered proved that to him. So he determined to reexamine other past experiences to probe them for any underlying surprises.

And he also learned just how traumatic the abductions had been for him, how frightened and powerless he felt in the hands of these beings. It would take all his courage to undergo further regressions, and he prayed that his need for the truth would be stronger than his fears.

Ted wanted to return to Barbara's as soon as possible, then, but the demands of life had to be met, too, and for several months he was too busy to make another trip. He was eager for knowledge, and the delay was frustrating. Yet he did everything he could to understand what he had already learned, using his sensitivity and logic and intuition that had been developed through years of psychic work.

And he kept himself extraordinarily alert. Anger was a strong motivation for Ted. He resolved to resist if any further intrusions occurred, and to demand answers from these beings who waltzed in and out of his life as if they owned it.

Armed with his newly found knowledge of their deceptive tricks, Ted felt ready to fight for the truth.

But how could one fight an intruder whose reality seemed to involve other dimensions? Ted's next encounter with the beings showed just how little he could do to stop them.

On the morning of December 5, he phoned Barbara to tell her about what had happened during the night, and he was clearly agitated.

"I awoke this morning with a vague recollection that I had a visitor last night," he said. "It was real dreamlike, but I think it's important to put my thoughts together before it all gets lost."

"Were you awake when this happened?" Barbara asked.

"I think so," Ted replied. "I remember being told to lie still. The voice was feminine. And then it came to me that someone was lying beside me on the bed. She lay slightly at an angle on her stomach with her head somewhere near the fold of my arm."

"What was she doing?"

"She told me that she was taking blood and that it was necessary that she do this. I didn't feel like resisting, and I don't even remember being afraid. That's what gets me, Barbara. It seemed to me that on some level I knew what was taking place and that it was all okay. I vaguely recall that there was no pain. The blood was taken with an object that looked like a needle, but for some reason I felt it wasn't quite like the ordinary needle used by our lab technicians."

"See if there's a puncture wound," Barbara said.

"I did," he told her, "I looked thoroughly, but there isn't any scar or puncture. I couldn't find physical proof."

"Do you remember what the woman looked like?"

"No, I don't. And I can't find any meaning for this thing. Don't other abductees usually have marks after such things are done to them?"

"Usually," Barbara agreed, "but not all the time."

"And what do they want with our body fluids, anyway? Maybe they're watching us to make certain no diseases interfere with their plans for us? I mean, they've got to have plans for us, if they've gone to so much trouble for so long, and

with so many people! Or maybe they want these fluids for the survival of their own kind. Who knows? We can't believe anything they say."

Ted was chagrined by his lack of resistance the night before. Did he really know something that made him agree to the procedure? Or was that just the result of the aliens' ability to control his thoughts and responses? Whatever the reason, he did not like being taken by surprise, and he really did not like giving in without a fight. That wasn't his nature.

A week or so later, on a rainy afternoon, Ted was at home visiting with his friend Bud and planning to finish signing and addressing his Christmas cards. The two men talked for a while, and then around four p.m. Ted pulled out the cards and began working on them. Bud excused himself and left the kitchen area for the bathroom.

At four thirty-five, Bud came back in and sat down at the kitchen table with Ted.

"How did you get so many cards addressed already?" he asked in surprise, glancing at the large stack of envelopes on the table.

"What do you mean?" Ted asked without looking up. "You've been gone long enough for me to have finished, but I stopped for a while to have a cigarette and another cup of coffee."

"Are you crazy?" Bud laughed. "I just went to the bathroom and then I sat down on the bed to listen to a song that was playing on the radio. Then I came right back in here. I haven't been gone five minutes!"

Ted looked up at his friend in puzzlement, but Bud's face was dead serious. In fact, he looked pale, and his manner was somewhat disoriented.

"Don't joke with me," Ted said, growing concerned. "I want to get these cards finished and take a nap before dinner."

"I'm very serious," Bud argued. "And I'm not joking."

"Do you remember commenting when you left the room that it was four o'clock and you were already hungry for dinner?" Ted asked.

Bud nodded, and Ted pointed up at the wall clock. It now

showed twenty minutes to five. Bud jumped up from his chair and went into the living room and then the bedroom, checking all the clocks. Then he came back in quietly and sat down, confused.

"What did you do?" Ted asked. "Tell me everything you remember."

"I just went to the bathroom," Bud replied, "and then I sat on the bed and listened to the radio."

"What song was playing?"

"I don't remember."

He got up and retraced his path through the house to see if he could recall anything else.

"Come in here!" he shouted to Ted, who followed quickly after him.

Bud pointed at the coffee table. "Did you put the scissors there?" he asked.

Ted stared down at the scissors in astonishment. For two days he had been looking for them, and Bud had helped him search the place earlier that day. Both men were certain that nothing had been on the table except for a potted plant and an ashtray.

"No," Ted said, "I didn't put them there. Did you? Are you trying to trick me?"

"Of course not," Bud snapped, shaken by the time loss and the reappearance of the scissors.

"We must just have overlooked them, that's all," Ted tried to reassure Bud, and he glossed over the missing time as well. He realized what might have happened, that Bud might have had an encounter in the other room while he sat, oblivious to anything, working on the Christmas cards.

But there was no way to know for sure, since Bud remembered nothing extraordinary. If the aliens were responsible, Ted wondered what the purpose of their visit might have been. Was it a sort of calling card, he asked himself, to let their presence be known? Were they showing him that there was nothing he could do to stop them, awake or asleep, if they chose to intervene?

Shortly after Christmas, another strange episode occurred while Ted's friend Carl was visiting for the holidays. That

night, Carl slept on the living room sofa, with a small night light glowing dimly. From Ted's bedroom, he could see down the hallway to the sofa, and when Ted awoke around three a.m. he glanced up.

There was no noise or movement as far as Ted could tell, and he did not know why he had awakened. Peering down the hallway, Ted saw a tiny blue light blinking above Carl, who was still asleep on the sofa. He also saw shadows, two or three of them, faintly moving around that area.

But before he could respond and get out of bed, a strong feeling washed over him and he lay back serenely. Ted suddenly felt that he knew what was going on with the blue light, and it didn't bother him. In fact, the whole situation seemed perfectly fine to him, and he immediately fell back asleep.

An hour later, Ted awoke again and sat up, warily alert. He looked down the hallway and saw nothing out of the ordinary. But he then remembered the dream he had just had and became agitated. He had dreamed that he saw Carl strapped down and someone using some sort of device on Carl's body. This person, or whatever it was, had a contraption inserted into Carl, and something was being removed and placed in a small bag.

That was all Ted remembered, but it was upsetting. He got up quietly and tiptoed into the living room. Carl was sleeping, and Ted saw no signs of disturbance. Reluctantly he went back to his bed, but this time he couldn't sleep. And when Carl woke up, Ted asked him if he remembered anything going on during the night.

"No," Carl said, "I slept just fine."

"How do you feel?" Ted asked.

"Fine. Why?"

Ted shrugged and let the matter drop, saying nothing about the dream. Surely it was just a dream, he told himself. The blue light, the shadows and rectal probe, everything could have been a nightmare.

About a week later, he got a phone call from Carl late one night, and his friend was very disturbed.

"I'm sorry to bother you like this, I know it's late," he told

Ted, "but I just had a bad dream, and I'm pretty shaken up."

"Tell me about it," Ted said. "What happened?" It was not like his friend to be so upset by a dream.

"All I remember is being with some strange people," Carl answered, "and they were teaching me how to use this real unusual looking headphone set."

"What did the people look like?"

"I don't remember," Carl said, "and I can't remember what the headphones were for."

"So what's got you so upset?" Ted asked.

"I don't know, I don't know," Carl repeated, but his agitation was evident. "This has got me real scared, though."

From his own experiences, Ted knew what the headphone scenario might indicate, but he said nothing to Carl, who had not heard anything about Ted's regression. He began to wonder if it was safe for him to have guests in the house any more. Marie's strange encounter the year before came to mind again, and Bud's missing time episode. Then there was the blue light above Carl, and Ted's disturbing dream. Now here was Carl's dream, and all its implications.

"Am I being used like bait?" he asked Barbara the next time they spoke by phone. "People have strange experiences when they come to visit me."

"I doubt it," Barbara replied. "From all the research, it doesn't seem likely that people would be abducted just because they're around you."

Ted felt she was right, that abductions probably begin early in life, but it didn't make him feel any better about what had happened to his friends. And he was miserably frightened whenever he thought about the things that had been done to him, so much so that he could not bear to be in the mobile home alone any more. After reliving the memories of his death and the cloning of a new body, he feared the aliens might come back, as they had promised to do from time to time, and perpetrate new outrages upon him.

He asked his friend Larry, who happened to be black, to move into the trailer for a while, at least until he had time to recover from his shattered sense of reality. And even with Larry's presence in the house, Ted had trouble going to bed

at night. In desperation, he began to surround himself with religious objects every night before retiring. He covered the bed with a total of eleven Bibles, he slept clutching a large wooden cross for protection, and he kept a small night light turned on in the corner of the room. Ensconced in the middle of all this paraphernalia, Ted fervently prayed himself to sleep, but it was a fitful sleep.

One particular night, when Larry had turned up the heat in the trailer, Ted was so sweaty that he stripped the heavy covers from his bed and went to sleep with only a sheet over his body. The eleven Bibles were spread all around, the wooden cross was firmly in hand, and overhead the ceiling fan stirred a breeze to cool him even more.

He had finally drifted off to sleep, so he was not aware when his cat, Grandma, came silently into the room looking for a spot on the bed where she could curl up for the night. Grandma had always slept with Ted, but since his return from Barbara's the cat had temporarily abandoned her usual space beside him at night.

She must have decided to overlook his weird behavior that night, because she was back. The cat looked around at all the books on the bed, and unable to see a clearing, Grandma leaped over the mess and landed right on top of Ted.

"Aaaahhh!" he screamed in panic, certain that the aliens were back to get him. He flailed up from the bed, scattering Bibles in every direction and brandishing the wooden cross as if it were a sword.

The sheet flew up and caught on the rotating fan blades, circling like a spinning ghost above him, and Grandma dived for cover. In the dark, Ted had no idea what was moving around him, but he beat defensively at the unknown invader, slapping the cross down again and again, rebuking in all directions, as the creature dived here and there trying to escape the attack.

"Aaaahhh!" he screamed again, and the cat squalled out in pain as the sheet swept back and forth across Ted's bobbing head.

The great commotion woke up Larry, who came hurrying down the hall toward Ted's bedroom. He barged through the

open door, and when he saw the ghostly sheet swirling around in the dimly lit room, Larry screamed out, "Haints! Haints!"

Pandemonium reigned, with Larry shouting, Ted screaming, and Grandma squalling, all at the top of their lungs. Somebody finally managed to turn on the light, and at last Ted could see just what had invaded his sanctuary. Grandma saw her moment to escape and tore off down the hallway, with Larry in hot pursuit. Ted hurried after them, still clutching the cross, but it was quite a while before they could catch the frightened cat and make sure she was not harmed.

Things calmed down at last, and Ted had a good laugh at himself and his paranoia. He and Larry cleaned up the mess in the bedroom and tried to get back to sleep for the rest of the night.

"My mama always said that white people were strange," Larry shook his head, walking back to his room. "She doesn't know the half of it."

Twenty-Two

Who could know heaven, save by heaven's gift...?
Marcus Manilius

Early in the spring of 1992, Ted went to central Arkansas for a weekend visit with Karla Turner and her husband, Casey. Through the lengthy investigation into Ted's experiences, he and the Turners had become good friends, so the visit was both for work and for pleasure. After his arrival on Friday, they talked until well after midnight and then rose rather late on Saturday morning.

"How did you sleep?" Casey asked as they sat sipping coffee in the living room.

"Fine," Ted said, "for a while, at least."

"Don't tell me something happened last night," Karla said, shaking her head at the expression on Ted's face. "Many people, including other abductees, have stayed in that room before, and no one has had any problem."

"I don't know if it happened or if it was a dream," Ted told her, "but I sure thought I was awake. I was acting completely awake, in fact, I was just getting out of bed to go to the bathroom, and then I started hearing helicopter blades whishing through the wind, right over the house."

Karla and Casey looked at each other in surprise. "We've had quite a bit of helicopter activity," she said, "back when we lived in Texas and here, too. My dogs hate the 'copters, and they always bark when they're overhead, but I didn't hear anything last night. I know we would have heard it, and the dogs would have barked. Are you sure about the noise?"

"Yeah, I sat up on the side of the bed, listening to the whirr of the blades," he went on, "and then the damnedest

thing happened. This man just appeared, coming right down through the ceiling."

"A man? What did he look like?" Casey asked. "Human or not?"

"Oh, he looked human," Ted said, "and he was wearing military fatigues. He came down into the room, and he had a little tow-headed boy with him, about seven or eight years old. You're going to think I'm crazy," he paused, "but that boy looked like me. Like I looked at that age, when the aliens cloned me."

"What did you do? Did anything happen?"

"Not really. The soldier just talked to me. He said that they were returning something that had been taken from me. And that's all I remember."

"How do you feel this morning, then?" Karla asked.

"Actually," Ted smiled, "I'm in a pretty good mood. I don't know what that was all about last night, but I wasn't frightened. It seemed like the soldier was trying to be nice, trying to make up for something."

"What do you think he meant, about returning something that had been taken?" Casey wondered. "If that little boy was supposed to be you, how could they give you back to yourself?"

"Who knows what he meant?" Ted said. "It doesn't make any sense."

"No," Karla agreed, "but you do realize how similar this scenario was to the episode you and Marie saw happening to Amelia, don't you? The virtual reality scenario?"

"My gosh, that's right," Ted said. "Amelia's experience started with the sound of a helicopter, too, and she said she saw through the ceiling."

"And the two aliens came down into the room, right?"

"Yeah," Ted nodded. "I wonder if there was a sphere of blue light around me that I couldn't see from the inside. That illusion Amelia saw never made any sense, and this one doesn't, either. I didn't see any blue light, but then neither did Amelia, just Marie and me."

But five days later, when he was back home in Shreveport, Ted had another experience that seemed related

to his visitation from the soldier, and this time there was a clear connection to his eight-year-old abduction.

"Remember what that soldier told me when I was at your house last weekend?" Ted asked Karla over the phone.

"Sure," she replied, "why? Have you figured out what he meant about returning something?"

"Maybe," he said. "You'll never guess what happened this morning. When the alarm went off, I raised up in the bed and saw something brown and fuzzy moving in the furrows of the quilt. It scared me, so I jumped, and when I did this fuzzy thing jumped, too. Grandma, my cat, was sitting on the corner of the bed where she sleeps, and she was staring real intently at this thing when I woke up. But when the fuzzy critter took off, so did Grandma, and the chase was on.

"I was yelling and dancing around, trying to get out of the way of this thing," Ted laughed, "because I still didn't know what it was. God, after everything else I've been through, it could have been anything! By the time Grandma cornered the creature, I had climbed up on top of the bookcase, armed with a pillow and ready to attack anything that came at me!"

"What on earth was it, Ted?" Karla asked, laughing, too. "Did you ever find out?"

"Oh, yeah," he said, "and you won't believe it. When I got up my nerve and went over to the corner of the room where Grandma had pinned this thing, I saw a beautiful baby rabbit just scared to death. It was covered with cat slobber where Grandma had clamped it down there, so I cleaned it off and cradled it in my arms to calm it down."

"Was it hurt?" Karla asked. "Did Grandma kill it? Anything my cats have ever dragged in were already dead and half eaten."

"Yeah, Grandma's like that, too," Ted replied, "but there wasn't a scratch on it. The poor little thing's heart was just racing like crazy, though. It looked about six weeks old."

"How do you think the rabbit got in your bed?" Karla wondered. "Could Grandma have caught it outside and carried it in last night?"

"I thought about that," Ted said, "but when I let the cat and the dog back inside for the night, I didn't see anything in

the cat's mouth, or in Lucky's. Grandma's other critters have always been dead, like you said."

"And you think this might have a connection with the soldier?"

"Right. Stop for a minute and remember back to the Karly story. When Karly was picked up and taken through the fog to the place where the children's choir was singing...."

"He was carrying a baby rabbit," Karla finished. "But when it was all over and they brought him back to the farm, the rabbit was gone."

"Yeah, that's what I thought about," Ted said. "I don't want to read too much into this rabbit thing, though. It might all be a coincidence."

"With all the weird experiences you've been through," Karla remarked, "it's hard to say. It could just as easily have been a staged event, coming so soon after your scenario with the soldier and the little boy. That really did sound like a virtual reality event."

"Maybe the first one was, but the rabbit was real, though," Ted said. "I released it back out into the woods."

"After someone went to all the trouble to return that which had been taken from you?" Karla teased.

"Real funny," Ted said. "Too bad they can't give back everything else they've taken from me."

Not long after this, Ted had a surprise visit from Marie. When he told her about the investigation Karla and Barbara were making into his past experiences, Marie offered to help. Plans were made for them to visit Karla and Casey for an extended interview.

One of the most important things Karla needed to discuss was the episode at Ted's trailer a couple of years earlier, when Marie encountered the small creatures who wanted to take her outside. In their discussion, Marie described the events of that night in the same way Ted had first related the story to Karla. She had seen the wall dissolve, and then some little beings came through and tried to lead her out.

"But I was too stubborn," Marie finished, "and when I got through telling them off, they brought me right back inside."

"I thought you said you never went outside in the first

place," Karla commented. "So how could you come back in?"

"I don't know," Marie replied, puzzled. "I didn't think I had gone out, but I do remember coming back in. Maybe I've forgotten something, it was a long time ago."

"You'd be surprised how much of this stuff we don't remember when things happen," Ted said. "If you really want to know what went on, Marie, maybe you could find out with hypnosis. It's helped me enormously."

"All right," she agreed. "If there was anything more than I remember, I surely want to know about it. I didn't recognize these beings, not spiritually, physically, or any other way, and I think we better try to find out what they really are."

"We can at least have a superficial look at the experience," Karla offered. "I won't try to lead you anywhere in particular, but if I help you achieve a trance state, you can go back through the experience yourself and tell us if you find anything you haven't yet remembered."

Marie had never been hypnotized before, so Karla led her first through a leisurely period of relaxation for both the body and the mind. When she was clearly in a light trance state, Karla directed her back in time to the night at Ted's.

"Marie, how are you feeling?" she asked.

"Tired," Marie murmured, "but happy to be visiting Ted. We're sharing things, experiences we've had, places we've been since we saw each other last."

"Fine," Karla said. "You're in bed reading a book. Move slightly forward in time to the point where something next occurs, and just tell me everything."

"I can't seem to keep my mind on the book," Marie said. "I feel strange, can't hold the book. It won't stay in focus. There's something strange going on."

"Is this making you feel uncomfortable?" Karla asked, noticing the worried expression on Marie's face.

"Yes," she replied, "this isn't supposed to be going on here. Everything's supposed to be happy, and it's not happy any more."

Marie paused and squinted her closed eyes. "It's almost like someone's driven up with a floodlight," she continued. "God, it's coming into the trailer."

"What color of light?"

"It's got sparklers in it. It keeps moving. The walls, between the light and the bedroom, they're disappearing!"

"Are you in bed?"

"Yes, and I'm going to stay here. There's somebody in the light. The walls are going away."

"Do you see Ted?" Karla asked.

"He's asleep," Marie said. "I can see him, hugging his pillow. There are no walls in the trailer any more."

"How are you feeling now?"

"I don't like this," Marie repeated. "I don't feel good with it, yet I can't move."

"You said there was someone in the light. Look and tell me everything you can see about this person," Karla said.

But by then the mental images Marie was reliving absorbed all her attention.

"Don't touch me," she said, apparently addressing the figure in the light. "Back off, don't touch me."

"Has this person reached toward you?"

"Yes," Marie nodded, "and somebody's over here." She gestured to the side of the room.

"So there are two persons present?"

"Get away from me, get away," Marie said forcefully. "Don't touch me!" Her hands shot out in front of her, warding off the intruders. "I can see eyes looking at me. I don't like them."

"What do they look like?"

"Almost like cat's eyes, very predominant."

"How close are they to you?"

"Right here," Marie indicated in the air close to her face. "I don't want them to touch me. Stop! There's another one, they're watching me. They want me to put my hands down, but I won't."

Karla asked her to describe the beings, but Marie could tell her very little other than that their eyes were yellowish.

"Can you see anything else?" Karla asked. "A nose, or mouth?"

"Just the eyes. Almost looks like the face is a flat mask. They look slimy. This one's trying to talk to me."

"What is he saying?"

"He has something in his hands," Marie replied, "like a crystal ball. Small, with some colors in it. He's holding it."

"What do the hands look like?"

"Almost like sticks, thin fingers. He gives me the ball," Marie continued. "It feels tingly, like electricity but not hurtful. He tells me I can have this, but I'm not so sure I want it. Looks peculiar to me. Oh, well, I guess it won't hurt. If I look at it more, I might like it better."

"What do you do with the ball?" Karla asked.

"Nothing, but I'm really sleepy now," she answered.

"Do you still have the ball?"

"Yes. This one is pointing, saying if I'll hold that ball, he'll help me fly. But I don't know if I want to fly or not. Somebody else just came in, and he's different from these others, almost like a child. He's reaching out his hand, he wants me to take it," Marie explained. "He's about twelve years old, dark hair, black eyes, like an Indian child. He says he's lost something, wants me to help him find it."

Marie's initial paralysis was now gone, and while the three cat-eyed beings watched silently, she let the childlike entity lead her outside and off into a wooded area.

"The others are following," she said, "I guess to see where we're going. Now we're going on, and it almost looks like a tent here. We're in a tent of some kind, odd-looking. Doesn't feel like a tent. There's something like a computer inside, standing up against the wall. And this child I'm with goes over to the computer thing. He wants to push the buttons on it," she continued with a worried expression.

"What happens when he does that?" Karla asked.

"It sounds weird, like a lot of bees buzzing, buzzing, buzzing," Marie replied, imitating the noise. "It's in my head, making my head hurt. This computer has different colored buttons on it, and I can see the screen there, like a monitor, showing lines, almost like a heart monitor."

Marie described the equipment and noted that the child was playing with it, and then she saw the images on the monitor start to change.

"Something like the bones of the face are showing on it,"

she said, "like a photo negative of a face."

"Whose face?"

"I can't tell, just the bone outline of a face. Now the picture's moving," Marie said, "as if it's going down the body."

"Are you saying anything to the child?"

"I'm trying to get him to leave the machine alone, before he tears it up," Marie told her, "but he just smiles and tells me to be still."

"Look down at your body," Karla suggested, "and tell me what you're wearing."

"Hmm," Marie murmured, "I don't see anything."

"Were you wearing something when you went to bed?"

"Yeah, pajamas."

"Where did your clothes go, then?"

"I don't know. The boy is moving the machine," she said as her attention shifted, "like it's my body he's got on the screen."

"How could he be doing that?" Karla asked.

"I don't know," Marie said, "unless it's that light at the top of this tent. There's a pale light at the top, like a sunlamp, shining down on me."

"See what is on each wall of the room," Karla suggested. "What is in each of the other corners?"

"Looks like a statue over here," Marie began, "a statue of a woman, without any clothes on. Like somebody's just molded this. It's big, but maybe not as tall as I am. A female figure standing there on the floor." Marie's closed eyes squinted as she studied the mental image.

"And what is the floor like?"

"Like stainless steel. The machine, the computer, is here. And there's a different little machine over here, looks like a tall water cooler. That's funny, and it's got a little gurgling in it."

"Tell me about the water," Karla asked. "Anything in it, any color?"

"I don't think I want any of it," Marie replied dubiously. "Looks cloudy. It might not be good, maybe some kind of fungus in it."

"Move on around the room. What else?"

"What is this thing?" Marie asked in surprise. "Like a bearskin rug? Something up on the wall. A decoration?"

Then her attention was drawn elsewhere. "These three people keep wanting to move back in close to me, and I don't want them to touch me. I don't know them."

"Can you see them more clearly now?"

"They're hiding something. They've got on, not capes, but like choir robes, all the way down to the floor, grayish color. They won't let me see their faces. Like they have a mask on."

She reiterated her fear of being touched, and then she noticed that something had apparently upset the child at the computer.

"There's something he can't work right," she said. "He's trying to talk to these people, but I can't understand what he says, he's talking so fast. Something about the ball? Or back to the ball? He's having some kind of tantrum, telling them, 'back to the ball.' And now they're backing away. He's coming over into the light where I am. He wants me to have some of that water, but I don't want it. He hands me a glass of the water, but I won't drink it."

"What does he do then?" Karla asked.

"He's not trying to argue with me. He treats it almost like a joke, like he thinks he can tease me and I'll go ahead and drink it. But I don't.

"There's something going on outside," she said abruptly. "He takes the water and sets it down, and now we're going out to see what's happening. It sounds like a bunch of frogs hollering, but I don't see them. It's dark out there."

Marie's memory after this became rather vague and hazy, and she could recall nothing more about the stir outside the strange tent. She remembered only being led back to Ted's trailer by the child, with the other figures following, and when she saw herself in the yard, the whole recollection faded away. Unable to elicit anything more, Karla brought Marie out of the trance.

"Good grief," Marie said as she got up and began to move around, "I never knew there was anything more to that experience than I've always remembered."

"In these encounter experiences, that's fairly common,"

Karla said, and Ted nodded.

"I haven't told you all the things that I remembered under hypnosis," he said, "but some of the details you just recalled are very similar."

"Like what?" Marie asked, intrigued.

"Like your being naked," Ted explained, "and the liquid you were supposed to drink. And the computer business, seeing your body scanned up on the screen, the irritating noise, and even the figure of the naked woman you saw."

"You mean you saw a naked woman, too?" Marie laughed.

"No," Ted replied evasively, not wanting to frighten Marie with the details of his own memories, "no, I was a little boy, and the naked figure I saw was also a child."

He realized that even in the very light trance state Marie had recalled enough similar details that he suspected what else might still be hidden in her mind. With their deceptions and illusions, he thought, the aliens can successfully mask their real activities and leave the abductee's consciousness with very little. And even under hypnosis, when memories are explored in a superficial manner, he knew that the emerging recollections were often partial and deceptive.

"This is all so strange," Marie shook her head. "I just don't know what to think."

"And did you know what to think that night in Florida when you and Ted saw Amelia in that sphere of blue light?" Karla asked.

"No," Marie said, "the whole thing was mind-boggling. You know, Amelia was really impressed by that helicopter thing she said she saw above my house. Not long after that, she and her husband went out to an airfield where the Army was demonstrating some aircraft and helicopters. She wanted to find one like that device because it was so unusual. They looked all over the field and didn't see one like it anywhere.

"So Amelia went over to one of the soldiers guarding the planes, and she started describing this device," Marie continued, "asking where it might be. Amelia told me that the soldier looked at her very strangely. He told her that he didn't know where she had gotten that information, but that

there was a design for such a craft. He said it would be in use someday, but not until far in the future, and he wanted to know how Amelia had learned about it."

"Amelia didn't see a UFO, then, over your house," Karla commented.

"No," Marie said, "it looked like a very weird helicopter. She never saw a UFO, and neither did I that night at Ted's. All I saw was a strange tent."

Ted laughed but said nothing. From his own regression, he knew all about alien false appearances. And if Marie needed to think she had been in a tent, he would not disabuse her of the notion. After all, she had only agreed to aid his investigation, not to undertake her own. He was convinced, however, that alien visitors had indeed intruded into his friend's life, at least that once. And he hoped that he wasn't the cause.

Twenty-Three

Everything that deceives may be said to enchant.
Plato

At last the timing was right for Ted to make another trip to Barbara's and continue exploring some of his experiences. The drive from Shreveport was six hours long, tiring him too much to consider any hypnosis that night. Instead, Barbara and her husband served dinner, they all fed the ducks at the pond, and then the three of them talked and laughed and entertained one another until bedtime.

Well-rested the next morning, Ted was ready to work. Barbara helped him relax and led him easily into a light trance state. As his concentration deepened, she suggested that he should move to whatever experience his subconscious thought was important for him to recall.

Before long, Ted began a mental journey back to his childhood. An initial scene resolved itself into details, and he slowly told Barbara what he was seeing.

"Lights," he said softly, "I'm sensing lots of lights, and they seem all to be in my grandmother's house."

"In what room?"

"They're in her back bedroom. And it looks like there are people moving around in the lights."

"Is your grandmother aware of these lights? Does she know they're in the room?"

"She seems to be asleep at one time, and then she's up talking to whoever it is there."

"Where are you when this is happening?"

"I'm in another bed, watching. She's standing up looking out the window, and it's dark."

"Does she say anything or express any emotion?" Barbara asked.

"I think she comes back and puts me under the bed," Ted said wonderingly.

"Why would she put you there?"

"Then there were some lights," he answered, "and a noise, a whirling kind of noise. We can hear it but can't tell where it's coming from. That's what makes her put me under the bed, and then she gets under there with me."

"Ted," Barbara asked, "how old are you here?"

"Really small," he said, "about four years old."

"What is taking place now?"

"There's a light over us, and it's spinning, creating like a vacuum, like looking up through a tornado. There's movement all around us. Everything seems to be dark."

At that point, Ted was unable to proceed any further with the brief recollection, so Barbara suggested that he let himself move on to any other significant event.

"Move forward in time," she said, "to the next thing you can see."

Soon he began to get new images, also from his childhood but this time involving his other grandmother, and himself at a slightly older age. Ted struggled to regain a clear sense of vision, but something–an induced block, perhaps, or his own reluctance–held him back. And then, as if bubbling up from somewhere deep within him, information began to trickle into his mind. His recollections started in the midst of a bizarre scene unlike anything Ted had ever consciously remembered.

"Grandy is standing on something," he started again, after a long pause. "She seems hypnotized, she's not saying anything. They remove her nightgown, and they've got something like a little drill, touching to the back of her head. They've done something to her, and she's slightly different."

He paused again, as if listening. "They're telling her she's very special," he resumed. "They put a white gown on her and make her look beautiful, or they're telling her she's beautiful. They dress her up and tell her that she's beautiful, and that she's coming to live and work with them."

"How old are you here?" Barbara interrupted.

"I'm ten years old," he said. "I remember this, the room, and these beings around her, and I'm watching. She's not in control, and they're all around her. They've loosened her hair and are showing her how beautiful she'll look when she lives with them. They're preparing her for this. That's all I seem to be able to see right now. And she does look beautiful, and young, too."

Ted stopped again, pondering. "I don't feel like that's all exactly right, though," he admitted. A mental alarm went off, because the words felt false even as he spoke them.

"We want only the truth," Barbara said, "that's what we're aiming for."

"I suddenly felt like that stuff was what they told me I was seeing, but it's not really," Ted said.

"Clarify your vision," Barbara told him, deepening his trance, "and tell me what is really happening."

"She's complaining about the pain," he continued, "and they've brought somebody else in. I feel like they're antagonizing and torturing her. Somebody's come in who says he's my grandfather, but my grandfather is dead. She's arguing with him that it's not her husband, she doesn't care what they say. Somebody's angry. And that's all I can see right now."

"Ted," Barbara asked, "is this the grandmother you were with in bed the night you heard the voice in the room?"

"Yes."

"How old were you when that happened?"

"Ten."

"Let's shift your focus to that night," Barbara directed. "Feel the bed, you're in bed with your grandmother. Feel it, and your memory is perfect. Do you feel yourself there now?""

"Yes," he slurred, sinking deeper into the trance.

"On the count of three," Barbara continued, "you begin to tell me, with truth and clarity, what happened on that night. One, two, three."

"I can hear her voice now," Ted responded. "She's demanding that we be taken home. She's complaining about the pain in the back of her head. She's telling them to get that

thing away from her."

"How did this start?"

"I remember we were sleeping," he explained, "and somebody takes me out of the bed. Then the next thing I know, I'm at the side of the room, and somebody who's got a hood over their head is beside me. My grandmother's in the center of the room, they've taken off her robe and put another one on her and done something with her hair. She does look beautiful, but before that they did something with that strange drill to her head. She got very angry, and I think she hit one of them because they were hurting her.

"I'm beginning to see," he said after a short pause, "what she hit wasn't a person. It was one of those dark gray or brown looking men, like a lizard-like man, one of those reptilian beings. They're offering her something to make her young again, and she's angry, refusing to cooperate. She's demanding that we be taken home. This reptilian guy leaves the room, and he comes back with... oh, this is making my grandmother very upset. They've brought in my grandfather who's been dead a while. He looks young and handsome, and they're telling Grandy that she's to join him."

"How does she respond?" Barbara asked.

"She tells them that it isn't true, that they are lying, that my grandfather is deceased. They're arguing, and she refuses to cooperate. I hear her calling out to Jesus."

He stopped again, listening.

"The reptilian man is talking ugly," he resumed, "and telling her that...."

He broke off abruptly.

"What is he telling her, Ted?" Barbara asked.

"He told her that they put something into her head," he said reluctantly, "and that if she doesn't cooperate, it would kill her, and only they can stop it. She still refuses."

"What did they want her to cooperate by doing?"

"I don't know!" he exclaimed, but Barbara directed him to program his inner computer for the truth and then to proceed.

"I can't understand it," he began again. "But it has something to do with sick people."

"Did your grandmother have anything to do with sick people?"

"She could make warts disappear, and things like that. She knew where to get roots and herbs in the woods and use them to make people well. They told her something about sick people coming to her, but she refused to participate. It wasn't for the right reasons, she said. She called on Jesus two or three times. I can hear her saying, 'No, no, I will not!' They're telling her that someone will come and teach her more, but she doesn't want to learn anything from them."

"Why would it be evil if they wanted her to cure people with their knowledge?"

"I don't know, but every time they tell her this, she tells them no. Then the reptilian man tells her she's going to die because she won't cooperate."

Ted became very sad, and then he caught his breath with a start.

"What is it, Ted?" Barbara asked. "What did you just become aware of?"

"He told her he would have my soul," Ted replied, "and they brought me to the center of the room where she is. They're doing something to me. No, she steps in between them. There are several beings around: me, Grandy, this reptilian man, my grandfather. He's standing there immobile, like he's in a daze. She steps in between me and the reptilian man, puts out her hand and stops him. She's telling him that she's not afraid of him, that she's met him before. I don't know after that," he sighed. "They do something, and we're back in the bedroom."

"Do you remember telling me you heard a voice that night?" Barbara reminded him.

"I feel like it was the voice of that man wearing the hood, but I'm not sure."

"She died not long after that, didn't she?"

"Yes, she died two days later of a massive stroke. That day I went to her because I remembered the talking that night in the room. I asked her about it, and she held me and started crying. She told me to forget about it, that it was the devil. Then she got my father to take her back home, and we all

went. Less than two hours after we arrived, Grandy had a stroke in front of us and died.

Barbara listened to Ted describe the scene, and as he relived the events, his memory strengthened. He said once again that he had always felt some guilt about his grandmother's death.

"I kept thinking that something I did caused it," he finished.

"What made you feel that?"

"I guess because of what happened during the night. She was trying to protect me."

"Let's get it all out," Barbara said. "Go back and look at the situation."

"This reptilian man was talking about me, when we first got there. It had something to do with my being, and with the other group that had had contact with me. I'm not sure who the other group is. They wanted my soul, and Grandy protected me. She said, 'Jesus will not allow you to touch this child or take him.' That's when he told her she would die."

"Move back to where they're putting the gown on her," Barbara suggested, hoping that Ted's recollections would be clearer and more complete, now that he had begun breaking through the screen sequence. "What is the truth? Tell me the truth about what is taking place. Remove all the blinders, all the veils of deception."

Ted's chest began to heave.

"Oh, no!" he whispered in fright, shaking and panting for breath. "I don't want to look at that any more!"

"You don't have to look any more," Barbara assured him soothingly.

"I don't have to look," he whispered even more fearfully, "because I know, I already saw."

Barbara led him into a more serene state of mind, reminding him of the protective energy he had built around himself. At last he began to breathe more normally, listening to her soft words.

"The reptilian man was wanting to have intercourse with her," Ted said, once he was able to speak again with any control. His voice was more sure, yet tinged with a deep note of

sorrow and resignation.

"But she wouldn't allow it. She told him she only did that with her husband, and he was dead. So they brought in the grandfather, and he was having sex with her. But when he got off her, it wasn't him, it was a reptilian man. And that's when she intervened. They wanted me next, I don't know, but I think it was sexual. That's when she jumped in front and blocked the reptilian man. They were arguing, and he told her she would die for that. And she did."

"It didn't seem to matter that she was older?" Barbara asked, referring to the sexual activity.

"They told her they could make her young again."

"Can you describe the situation more completely? How did they do it to her? Was it just the one?"

"There were several in the room, as well as the one with the hood who had been holding me back. I never saw his face very clearly, but when he turned it looked pasty white."

"Did they have her on a table or standing up?"

"Standing up, but leaning back on something like a movable table."

"Do you want to see the rest?" Barbara asked cautiously. "Remember, you said he started coming toward you?"

"Yeah, he wanted me for some reason."

"Do you want to go back and find out?"

"Yes," Ted sighed, "let's go back."

Barbara returned him to a deep concentration and then asked him to look at the scene again.

"What is your grandfather doing while intercourse is taking place?" she asked. "Is he aware?"

"He was doing the raping," Ted tried to explain, "but it wasn't really him. When they brought him in, he took her in his arms and started making love to her. They removed her gown, and she was immobile, not speaking. But when they were finished and he turns around, I can see him. It isn't my grandfather, it's the reptilian man."

"Backtrack a minute," Barbara suggested, "back to where they were telling her about the herbs."

"They were talking to her because she knew a lot about herbs. He tells her that he's got some herbs. Oh," he paused,

"oh, they're wanting her to take some of theirs. He's telling her they can exchange information and for her to try his stuff. She takes something they put on her tongue, and I think they gave me some, too.

"They dropped it in our mouths. It was kind of clear, maybe slightly yellow. Everything seems to be centered around Grandy now," Ted described as he relived the event. "She refused to have sex with the reptilian, so they left and hurried back with supposedly my grandfather. By that time, my grandmother seems to be submitting to the sexual situation. She doesn't seem to be resisting. After he's done with her, another one's on her now. Then they take me and lift me up on top of her as if I'm supposed to be having sex with her. But I can't recall any stimulation."

"Does she respond to you?"

"She seems to be kind of out of control."

"That thing they gave you by mouth, did it affect you in any way?"

"I don't think I was sexually excited," Ted said, "but it affected Grandy, like they'd given her some kind of aphrodisiac."

"What's happening now?"

"There's more than one that has intercourse with her," he continued, 'at least three. Then the one that looked like my grandfather comes over, and he makes me have oral sex with him."

"So does he have a penis?"

"Yeah, but it doesn't look like a normal man's. It looks more like a male dog, more shaped like a little gun. Instead of just getting an erection, it seems to come out of an encasement like a gun.

"They've moved my grandmother off the table," he said, "and they put me on it. It's flat now, horizontal. Then one of them has anal intercourse with me. They say something about the other group that has something to do with me, and it's like they're laughing about it. Like they're making fun of the situation."

Ted's disgust was evident, but he was also bewildered. "I don't know what they're talking about," he admitted, "but

it's me. They're doing this to get even, maybe, that's the only way I know how to say it."

"How do you feel while this is happening to you?" Barbara asked. "Are you able to think?"

"I'm crying out for Grandy," Ted said. "I can't seem to feel a lot of pain, but I'm terribly frightened. My hands are clamped down on something, and my ankles, too. When that reptilian came to take me and says they're going to keep me there, Grandy steps in between us. She says, 'In the name of Jesus Christ, I demand that you stop.' She says that for what they've done to us, he will burn in hell forever. He says there is no hell.

"She says, 'You're not going to have our souls.' She rebuked him, that's what made him so angry. She's got me close to her, and they're all standing back, and she says, 'You tricked me, you tricked us.' She's angry about the herbs and what they did to us."

After a brief pause, Ted concluded the recollection.

"That's all I can remember. We have our clothes back on, and he tells her, 'You're going to die for this, because that boy belongs to us.' And then we seem to be back in our bedroom."

"How do you feel now?"

"Repulsed somewhat," he admitted, "angry. Hurt. Glad that I looked at it, but it was so hard to look at. The first regression came easier. They didn't want me to see this one. Old Volmo, my buddy, the reptilian who taught me all those wonderful things, I bet he's the sorry bastard who was doing that to me."

Ted shook his head, overwhelmed and deeply angry.

"No wonder he liked me so well. I bet he's done other things, too, when he used to come and visit me in Atlanta. I would remember it the next day, that he'd been there and taken me places. He seemed to be extremely fond of me, in a very loving kind of way. I didn't know that he was bad."

It was time to end the regression, so Barbara directed Ted to return to the present time and place. Then she led him up from the trance state and made sure he was back in a normal state of consciousness.

Ted needed to talk about the sad memories, relating even more details than he had been able to report in the hypnotic state. And he wanted to talk about Volmo, rethinking those encounters with his new understanding.

"You didn't remember him from childhood, after he appeared in Atlanta?" Barbara asked.

"Not at all," Ted said. "I thought he was just another of the spirit guides, like Sharon and Raphael. He was awful looking, though. And that place where my grandmother and I were stank, smelled putrid, like a dead animal. I think that's how the reptilian ones smell."

"What about that surgical procedure performed on your grandmother?"

"Whatever they put in her head, I believe, is what caused her to have the stroke. He got her out of the way, just as he threatened, and then later he had access to me whenever he wanted. She died protecting me, and I carried that hidden knowledge, that guilt, for forty years."

His whole life, Ted now realized, had somehow been orchestrated, on some level he couldn't grasp, by forces he couldn't begin to fathom. He did not know what to think any more, but he knew what he felt. The old, haunting sense of guilt, at least, was already beginning to subside, but angry resentment, tinged with fear, took its place. What else in his life, he wondered, had been manipulated? And why?

Twenty-Four

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Eliot

Gazing out the window a few weeks later, Ted was oblivious to the renewal of life all around him, in the bright spring green of the trees and the outburst of colorful flowers in the yards. His mind was filled instead with the image of a quiet grave in the old family cemetery back in Alabama. It was the fortieth anniversary of Grandy's death.

He remembered how she had wept the morning before, sheltering him in her embrace, and whispered the name of the devil. Ted mourned for her, as well as for himself and the forty years of guilt that had haunted him like a restless ghost.

"Thank God, at last I know the truth," he thought. "At last I can be free of the pain and uncertainty. It wasn't me, I did nothing wrong. It was that monster and his alien illusion of my grandfather."

The memory of what had been done to him and his grandmother was sickening and brought him out of his reverie. Ted looked up toward the field that lay quietly behind the row of trees and bushes, and his emotions surged.

"You came again, didn't you," he murmured, "and did things to me and my neighbors. You hid the memories from me, but it won't work. I'm going to go under hypnosis again. I'm going to find out what you did to us, and I will tell the whole world the truth. Someday I'll expose you for the bastards that you really are. I may not can do it right now, but

I'm getting stronger every day, and I will fight back. You can count on it. Thank God for Barbara's help. Without her, I might have gone to my own grave never being able to release my guilt and solve the mystery that plagued me all those years."

Thinking fondly of his friend, Ted reached for the phone and dialed Barbara. Several members of his study group were eager to work with her, too, having been witness to Ted's trauma and recovery after his regressions. They had also seen a shift in his attitude, away from the tentative acceptance of the aliens, as benevolent superiors coming to aid humanity, and towards uncertainty and skepticism about the aliens' true intentions.

This change made his friends concerned about the nature of their own experiences, although Ted had not shared the details of his recollections with the group. He told them only that what he had learned had been shocking, painful, and extremely disappointing. His friends tried but were not successful in learning anything more from him, as he insisted the information should be reserved until the others had gone through their own regressions.

"I don't want to influence what you might see or how you might feel about it," Ted explained when pressed to discuss his memories. "And besides, just because my experiences weren't what I hoped they would be, that doesn't mean yours won't be positive. You should just go through it and decide for yourself what it means."

Ted heard the receiver lift, and when Barbara answered the call, Ted said, "Greetings from the alien capital of the world."

"I'm so glad it's you," she said, immediately recognizing his voice. "I was thinking of you this morning. Has anything happened? You haven't had another experience, have you?"

"Actually, things have been pretty calm for me lately," Ted told her, "but I got a call from a woman whose family lives out in the country, and they've got quite an interesting story. I'd like for you to talk with her sometime."

"Sure," Barbara said. "Can you fill me in a little?"

Ted briefly recounted the tale, involving UFOs over the

farm seen by the family and by two deputy sheriffs who answered their call for help.

"Did they have any abnormal reactions or missing time?" Barbara asked.

"Not at first," he replied, "but soon after they started going through some pretty strange things. The most disturbing result has been the change in her teenaged son. He's become reclusive, he's failing in school, and now he won't even attend classes. He's been examined for drug use, but he was clean, and his mother doesn't know what to do now. He hardly ever leaves his room, he doesn't sleep at night, and when he does sleep in the day, he insists on keeping a gun in the bed. She can tell you all about it when you speak to her. They're looking for help, and I know they're suspicious that whatever may have happened wasn't too good, especially for her son."

"Of course I'll talk to her," Barbara answered. "In fact, I'd like to document the family's case for my research. It sounds worth exploring, since there was outside confirmation of the UFO by the deputies.

"But you know, Ted, I've found so little in this field that is positive that I really don't know what to tell people any more, unless I lie outright, and I can't do that. I guess the best thing is just to tell them that we have to keep working together and researching the material, that right now we don't know enough to confirm their suspicions. But the kind of problems you've described are familiar. I see them all the time in my investigations, and a few other researchers have told me of similarities in their work."

"I called for another reason, too," Ted said. " Barbara, can we arrange for you to come down here and work with my support group? Several of them very much want to have a session with you, and it would be easier all around for us to bring you here, rather than five or six people going up to Oklahoma."

"For you, my friend, I'd be glad to come," Barbara agreed, and soon the visit was arranged.

Ted set up a schedule of interviews and regressions for his friends. Each of them had a specific reason for wanting

hypnosis, such as disturbing dreams, possible missing time, mysterious visions or communications, and soon the entire week of Barbara's visit was filled with appointments.

Several times Ted considered scheduling a block of hours for himself, but reluctantly he concluded that he just was not ready yet. He was still trying to heal, to cope with the nightmarish memories, and to regain the reality they had taken from him. But his pledge to continue the investigation was resolute, and he knew the time would come when he would be strong enough to face the next revelation. In the meantime, there were others who needed help.

Barbara arrived the following week, and Ted welcomed her warmly.

"I'm so glad to see you," he said as they hugged. "All sorts of thoughts have been coming back to me about the things we uncovered, and I can't wait to discuss them with you."

He carried her luggage inside, and soon they were deep in animated conversation. Barbara was not scheduled to meet with anyone until the next day, so the first night the two friends talked, giving her a chance to gauge Ted's progress since the last regression.

"Has any other specific information come to you?" she asked. "After hypnosis, sometimes more memories start to surface on their own."

"Maybe not new memories," Ted replied, "but I've been able to look at all the things I did see and analyze them more clearly now. It was so overwhelming, trying to take in everything in the state I was in, that I couldn't understand all that went on at the time. Like that woman I remembered doing things to me when I was cloned, the one with red hair and lots of make-up?"

"What about her?" Barbara asked.

"She wasn't a woman," Ted said, "she was an alien, but they had her disguised to look more human. Maybe they thought it would calm me down, and I guess it did. But now that I realize how they were able to trick me, I wonder about a lot of the things other abductees report seeing. How much of it is fake? People recall seeing those beautiful blond human

types on the UFOs, and hybridized, half-human half-alien babies and people, but I wonder if those aren't just more cases of disguised ETs and false illusions."

"People sometimes are able to see through the disguises," Barbara told him, "but most of the time they don't even question what they think they see."

"Right," Ted nodded, "and that's why I've gone back over everything so thoroughly. Some of it's starting to make sense now. Remember my description of the process that woman performed, putting my soul into the cloned body?"

"Of course," Barbara replied.

"I think that showed me something very important," he continued. "When the cloned body was placed on the table, it was completely inert. The woman placed the black box with my soul on the new body, and then they did something that activated the body, because I saw it twitch and jerk, and then the chest started expanding as it breathed. That's when I found myself in the new body.

"Remember that they didn't remove my soul from my original body until I drank the green liquid and apparently died," Ted went on. "Looking at both procedures, I think I understand now that the soul is apparently locked into the body by an energy field, the aura, that forms once the body is breathing. They can't take the soul out without killing the body, and it isn't locked into a body until breath is drawn.

"You know," he paused, "I wonder what that might mean to the abortion question. If I'm right and the soul only connects with the body after it's breathing, then fetuses may not contain souls until after they're born. And what about the walk-ins that Ruth Montgomery has written about? They're supposedly cases where souls are changed out of a body, so that a second soul can inhabit it for a while. Is this the same process the walk-ins use to get into those bodies? I wonder if they're aware that the body has to die in order for the trade-out to take place."

The conversation continued for hours, but at last they needed to sleep and rest up for the next day's work.

While Ted was at work, Barbara met with Joel, a single man in his mid-thirties who had been plagued by restless

nights and other symptoms of stress after a UFO sighting the previous year. Joel had difficulty relaxing enough to achieve a deep trance state, but eventually he remembered a few details, including the typical on-board examination and a group of humanoids who appeared dressed in medieval-type clothing. His memories were sparse, however, and although he did not recall anything particularly traumatic, Barbara noticed that his emotional and physical responses under hypnosis were overly intense.

"Joel's stress was clearly apparent," she told Ted later that evening. "That's one of the indications I watch for, the discrepancy between the events and the emotional response. The things Joel remembered shouldn't have been that upsetting, so probably there are other details still hidden from his recall. He's responding subliminally, even if he can't remember them."

"Well, if he's been through anything like I have," Ted commiserated, "then I can understand his anxiety. Who are you seeing tomorrow?"

"A woman named Paige," Barbara said, checking the schedule.

"You'll really like her," Ted nodded. "Paige is a wonderful person, really sweet and intelligent. She's been going through some problems of her own, though, and I'll bet that her UFO experiences are involved."

When he came home from work the next day, Ted was eager to hear what had happened with Barbara and Paige, but this time Barbara was reluctant to discuss the regression.

"Let's wait a while before I go into that with you," she suggested.

"Why?" Ted asked. "Paige already told me that she wouldn't mind me knowing whatever she found out."

"Trust me about this," Barbara replied. "Paige's experience may turn out to be similar to something you and I haven't yet explored in your case. I'd rather wait to see what you remember before I tell you about her recollections."

"Was she surprised or upset about it?" he asked, intrigued.

"Yes," Barbara nodded, "she was pretty disturbed, but

she did feel better when it was over, relieved to have gotten it out finally. God, Ted, some of the things people report to me are just incomprehensible. Knowing how the aliens can manipulate our perceptions, I can't help wondering just how much of what abductees see in their experiences is actually real. How do we know that all these things aren't simply illusions programmed into our memories?"

"Some of it obviously is false," Ted agreed, "but in my case, at least, there were some very real events that several other people witnessed. When I was taken and cloned at eight years old, I remembered being returned to the house in a dark, swirling atmosphere, and all of my relatives saw what they thought was a tornado. They'd been out looking for me because the storm was coming up, and nobody could find me until it blew over. My uncle said that he saw different colored lights inside the funnel cloud, which probably came from the UFO.

"And after that," Ted continued, "Mama and the others remember how I changed. For weeks I complained about horrible burning in my body, and my mother bathed me with cold, wet towels trying to soothe me. My personality changed, too, and I was withdrawn and real quiet, not at all like I'd acted before."

"Your grandmother witnessed whatever had gone on with you two later on," Barbara pointed out, "even though she thought those beings were devils."

"Can you blame her?" Ted replied. "I wish all this stuff wasn't real, but it sure seems to be. Either that, or these beings are going to extreme measures to make people believe that it is. Why would they do that, though? What are they getting out of such intrusions, real or contrived?"

"That's the big question," Barbara mused. "Just pray that someday we have an answer."

She met the next day with Leslie, one of Ted's coworkers. As they got to know each other, Leslie explained that she had met Ted when he was doing psychic readings in a town where she was living. She was just one of many people attending his presentation, until Ted singled her out with the message that someone in the spirit plane, named James,

wanted to get in touch with her.

"I was really excited," Leslie said, "because my teenaged son had just recently died after a motorcycle wreck, and his name was James. A few months later, I went to Ted for a reading and asked about James. Ted said that James was telling him that he was busy helping his new friend Rodney adjust to the spirit world.

"That made no sense," Leslie continued, "because James didn't know anybody named Rodney I told Ted he was wrong, but he wouldn't back down. He insisted that he was delivering James' message accurately. Later I asked all of James' friends if they knew a Rodney, but nobody could identify him."

"So you thought Ted's information wasn't genuine?" Barbara asked.

"Yes," Leslie replied, "until a few weeks later when I was in town shopping. I spotted a couple who looked familiar, and then I remembered having seen them at the hospital before James died. While he was in a coma, another young boy was brought into ICU, the victim of a car accident. That couple had been up there with him, he was in a coma, too, but I never talked to them.

"This time, though, I did, and asked about their son. They told me that he had remained in a coma for a few more months and just recently had died. His name was Rodney."

She looked at Barbara a moment before continuing. "I had not known his name in the hospital, and both Rodney and James were in comas the whole time they were together. How could Ted have known those names, unless James' spirit really is on the other side, with Rodney's?"

"Maybe Ted wasn't wrong, after all," Barbara remarked, and Leslie agreed.

After listening to some of Ted's discussions, she continued, her interest in UFOs started to develop. And when he mentioned missing-time episodes, her curiosity changed to concern. As she told Barbara during their interview, Leslie had been driving one night several months earlier and found herself lost in a sudden fog. She remembered driving around for quite a while before the fog lifted, and she felt there may

have been some missing time then.

Barbara put Leslie into a trance state and guided her back to the night in question. But after a long, patient exploration of her memories, Leslie uncovered only a brief memory of being on a table and seeing gray forms standing around. The beings were familiar, however, and this recollection sparked others, concerning the presence of such creatures at the conception and birth of each of her children.

Describing one of these deliveries, Leslie told Barbara how the alien beings held the newborn child and, as one might dust a baby with talc, somehow powdered it with light. But her memories were too fragmented for her to gain any overall understanding of the beings or the extent of their involvement in her life.

Only one more person was scheduled to meet with her, and the next afternoon Barbara interviewed another of Ted's coworkers, a young man named Al. He told her about some possible UFO sightings he remembered, as well as about odd dreams and other occurrences symptomatic of alien contact.

For Al, the most important event was a vision he'd had of Jesus, whom at first he saw hanging on the cross. Al remembered feeling great pity and love for Jesus, and then being astonished when the figure looked up and began to move away from the cross and toward him. The last thing he remembered was Jesus kissing him, and when the vision was over, Al felt very moved and blessed by the event.

When Barbara helped him mentally return to that scene, however, Al described more details, and as the event grew clearer in his mind, he suddenly began to shake. The spasms increased, until at one point Al was jerking violently as the intense emotions surfaced. Barbara worked to calm him, and when he was able to continue, the vision he had recalled faded away and he saw something quite different.

Instead of Jesus, the image transformed into a grotesque reptilian creature, forcing itself sexually upon the terrified man. He was so appalled and disturbed that Barbara brought the session to an end as soon as he had released enough emotion to regain his composure.

"After the session," Barbara told Ted that evening, "Al

was totally confused and upset. All along he had believed that his experience was spiritual and positive. He had no conscious memory of the rape or the deception that hid it."

"Damn those creatures!" Ted said angrily. "How dare they treat us in such ways! That's just like what they did with my grandmother, tricking her by bringing out that ET disguised as her dead husband."

He was very shaken by Al's experience, empathizing with his friend's trauma because his own had been so great.

"Before you told me about Al's situation," he said, "I don't think I really could let myself believe that my own memories of sexual abuse were true. I guess I was in denial because it was just too horrible. I hate that Al had to endure such a thing, Barbara, but in another way I'm relieved to know that I'm not crazy myself, knowing that this sort of thing has happened to someone else."

"You two aren't the only ones to report sexual intrusions," she replied. "I can think of at least three other recent cases like this, involving a housewife, an office employee, and a college science professor."

"If this is so common," Ted asked, "why haven't I read more about it in the UFO books?"

"Because so much of what abductees recall, even under hypnosis, is a screen memory," she answered, "not the actual event."

"When I was under hypnosis the first time," Ted said, "I had no idea that I would uncover anything like I did. I expected it might be a little spooky, but not traumatic. Did you already know that the aliens were doing these kinds of things?"

"Not the entire picture," Barbara told him. "Ted, I've worked on hundreds of cases over the years, but I've never had a person who was able to break through the screen memories as clearly as you did, or who could get around the blocks so well. You've provided a tremendous breakthrough, and your information will be invaluable to the researchers."

"What exactly do you mean by screen memory and blocks?" he asked. "I remember that you mentioned them at the time of my regression, but I was too emotional for very

much of it to sink in."

"Working with so many people," she said, "I've discovered that most abductees have been given screen memories. These programs are installed so that if the abductee begins to remember anything, it will not be something disturbing. The person might recall being taken on board a craft and physically examined. He may feel that he was probed but not injured and that whatever was done was for the good of all concerned.

"The abductee often feels that he was chosen and special," she explained, "and that he is making a great contribution to some scientific endeavor. Many people feel that the alien contact is truly good, but they are programmed to the extent that they're unable to see anything else, no matter what actually took place."

"Like when I thought the reptilians were exchanging medical information with my grandmother," Ted remarked.

"Right. But very often I find there is another story underneath. And once you get past the screen, you then find out what really occurred. When people break past the screen and see the truth, they are usually in shock and terrified just as you were. And sometimes there are specific blocks installed at the same time, that can appear to be many different things. In your case, you saw strange colors and extremely ugly, grotesque faces that frightened you. But once you realized they weren't real, that they were put there to disturb you and prevent you going further in your memories, you determined to get past them. And you did," she finished, "with remarkable ability, I might add. With most people it takes much more work."

"Is that why regressions take so long?" Ted asked.

"Well, it usually doesn't take long to get down to the screen memory," Barbara replied, "but, yes, from there we start peeling back the layers, working our way down below the screen in order to reach the true material."

"In my regression," Ted said, "the screen was my memory of a cultural exchange between Grandy and the aliens. If we had stopped there, I'd have gone on believing that the aliens needed her help for some reason, that maybe the two

of us had played an important part in helping these poor aliens get some necessary assistance."

"But when I directed you to program your mind for only the truth," Barbara interjected, "and we started approaching the event from different angles, you were slowly able to look past the implanted suggestion of the screen. Each approach let you peel back another layer, and this is sometimes a long, tedious process. People who think you can just lie down, go into a trance within a few minutes, and then quickly relive an experience have no idea how much hard work and time is actually needed.

"I have some cases," she told him, "who've come to me after working with other hypnotists because they feel that something was wrong with what they'd recalled in the trance. Several have said to me, 'Barbara, if my abduction was no more than a quick physical exam, why haven't I been able to sleep without sedatives for years? Why do I have panic attacks when I see certain pictures in UFO literature?' They've said to me, without any prompting, that they feel more things had happened than they were able to recall.

"And of course, when we work together, if they're able to break through the illusions left in their minds and see the real abduction, the memories may be traumatizing at first. But after some healing time has passed, many of them start to show a remarkable improvement with their emotional scars.

"This makes it all worthwhile," she sighed, "when I see someone get a good night's sleep after years of anxiety. I'm not a therapist, of course, but I'm a researcher who has spent years gathering this information. When I do a regression, I assist the person to go back and look at their experiences, but the practical fact is that this process is therapeutic by nature. Recalling the suppressed memories lets the emotions free, as well. Too many abductees aren't getting the time spent with them that is necessary to release all the abduction garbage and start the healing process."

"I guess there aren't many places for them to go for help," Ted said.

"There are a few qualified and trained out there," Barbara replied, "but not many, and certainly not enough. People are

afraid to go for help to most mental health professionals because they fear being looked upon as crazy."

"And they could be judged that way," Ted nodded, "if therapists misdiagnose them because they don't recognize the reality of the abductions. But these people aren't crazy, any more than I am, they're victims."

The next morning Barbara prepared to leave, and after Ted loaded her things into the car they sat down for a moment on the patio, reluctant to say goodbye.

"Before I go home," Barbara said, "I'd like for you to tell me just what all of this means to you personally, Ted. What do you feel is going on? What have you been able to understand?"

"I don't know if this will make sense," he replied, "or even if it's anywhere close to the truth, but I'll tell you how it feels to me, or at least what the situation implies. Back when I was being given messages and information during the night, I remember one particular lesson the aliens taught me. They explained that the space between physical matter isn't empty, but rather it is filled with positive and negative charges.

"Now, if you can imagine these two vast fields of charges somehow producing separate dimensions of existence," Ted continued, "and then imagine that these dimensions give rise to intelligent entities, each of them carrying the positive or negative charges according to which dimension produced them. It seems to me that we humans are a source of some sort for both of these kinds of creatures, and I can imagine them working together to shape us into the perfect creation, made of both positive and negative aspects, so that both of them can use us.

"They may not be good or evil in their own terms," he conceded, "even though their actions feel that way to us. But they certainly seem to be bound together in their involvement with humans. I remember the incident where the two aliens were arguing over me. Their discussion about the two groups involved with me seems to be related to this idea."

"One of them was rather rough and threatening with you, wasn't he?" Barbara asked.

"Yes," Ted said, "and the other one came in and protected

me from him, which pissed off the first one. It seemed like a real confrontation, but if they were really two opposing groups, what were they doing there together? They seemed to be sharing the premises. Not long ago, I read a passage in the Gnostic Gospels where Jesus talked about the good angels and the bad angels working together, Barb, and I think that's exactly what is going on with the ETs."

"Do you really think they are spirits or divinities or gods of some sort, then?" she asked.

"No, at least they aren't any gods I would find acceptable, but I don't know what I believe any more, to be honest. All the metaphysical and traditional religious beliefs I once had are gone with the wind," he smiled sadly. "I don't have any reality to hold on to now."

"Yes, you do," Barbara said, reaching out for his hand. "This is your reality. Believe in yourself, your own goodness. Maybe they did make us, Ted, who knows? But nonetheless we've emerged with something they don't have. And they sure want it. We have souls that let us feel emotions, and that makes us capable of love. They take our emotions because they have none of their own."

"They didn't just take mine, they plundered them," Ted said, "and almost destroyed me in the process. Are we so helpless? Isn't there anything we can do?"

"I don't know," Barbara replied. "And we won't know, until we learn everything about what the aliens are doing, what plan they're carrying out."

"If this is truly a battle," Ted said, "then knowledge may be our only weapon. And we sure need something. You know, Barb, this reality change has been extremely painful for me. The first few weeks after the first regression with you was the most frightening time in my entire life. I prayed, I cried, I doubted my sanity, and I feared they may have done something to me that would cause me to hurt myself or someone else. It took months before I regained any trust in myself. I was so afraid they would come back and punish me for discovering the truth about what they'd done to me. I'm certain I must have appeared as a mad man to those around me."

"My dear friend," Barbara assured him, "you were never thought of in such a way. Those of us who know you and know what you had faced understood completely. After all, your belief system was suddenly taken away from you. This would have been extremely difficult for anyone. Don't be too hard on yourself."

"One thing that has helped me tremendously," Ted replied, "was the revelation regarding Grandy's death. That situation has gnawed at me all these years, and now, Barbara, I know why. Now I understand the mystery that was left with me when she died so suddenly. She was the bravest, most courageous woman I've ever known. To think that she loved me so much that she stood up to those things, whatever they were. She wasn't about to let them take me. I owe my life to her. I wish I could thank her and show my love and appreciation."

Barbara looked at Ted consolingly and said, "She certainly was a very brave lady, one that any young man would be proud to have for his grandmother. She quickly saw through the deception of her dead husband, and she called upon the one thing she believed in very strongly, her religion, to try to save you. You must have been very special to her."

"For a long time I wanted the rape not to be real," Ted replied. "I wanted it to be an implanted suggestion, a hologram or virtual reality scenario. I even thought maybe they didn't actually, physically rape us but somehow abused our spirits or souls instead, and the memory somehow came out that way under hypnosis. I wanted it to be anything but what it was.

"Then after months of torturing myself, I finally accepted the fact that it didn't really matter, anyway," he continued, "because the damage was done regardless, and it couldn't be changed. I was so ashamed, humiliated, embarrassed, and eaten up with contempt and anger that I thought I would rather die than let anyone know what had happened, especially my family. But now I feel differently. I still hurt, but I'm more focused with it all, and I think now I know what I want to do."

"What would that be?" Barbara asked.

"I want people to know the truth," he replied. "I want people to know just how deceptive their space brothers really are. I want them to know that the great and wonderful aliens are really like demons who aren't supernatural at all, but are physical like we are–only they have the ability to hide behind superior technology. I want people to stop being so gullible like I was, and to start asking the right questions. We can't settle for anything less than the truth, from our government and from the so-called aliens themselves.

"It bothers me deeply, Barb, to think about all the innocent victims, especially the children, that confront the deceitful force every day. Just look at all the literature and information that is put out by people who truly believe that this is a good and wonderful thing for earth and the human race. I see now how easy it is for them to deceive us. All they have to do is glitter something pretty in front of us and we buy it.

"I suppose that we want so badly for some help from anywhere to assist us in cleaning up the mess on this planet, that when they bait us with their propaganda, we don't bother to ask how, where, and when, we just start yelling, 'Come on down!' If there are any positive and good aliens trying to help us, then I think they will understand when I say, show me your undeniable proof of good intentions first, and then I might invite you in for tea. Until then, peddle your lies in some other galaxy, not mine and Grandy's."

Barbara chuckled as Ted continued.

"I remember Grandy as a strong country lady who believed very much in truth and honesty. I know she always reprimanded me if I told a fib. And I truly believe that if she were here, she would support me in telling the truth. I believe she would agree that we must swallow our pride and tell the truth, because silence will not stop the treachery. It will only enable it to continue."

He walked Barbara to her car, thanking her again for the comfort, strength, and support she had brought him through a time of enormous turmoil.

"Let me know when you want to come back to see me for more regression work," she said.

"Yes, I know this work is only just beginning," Ted

replied. "And it's not a matter of just my own destiny any more, knowing that my friends and many others have had experiences, too. The truth is, the alien agenda has consequences for everyone. We know so little. It's like we're groping in the dark, and things just can't go on like this."

"It would take great courage, though," Barbara reminded him, "to get beyond the fear and penetrate all the illusions that mask the aliens' ultimate intentions."

"And even greater courage to stand up before a disbelieving world and reveal the knowledge that I've endured so much to gain," Ted added. "You know, the aliens, or spirits or whatever they were, kept telling me to write a book, to call it 'The Light Worker,' and I think that's what I should do. Only I can't call it by that title and play into their hands promoting their goodness and kindness. I've got to call it something else, something that will be closer to the truth as I see it."

"I'm sure you'll come up with the right title," Barbara said, taking her leave.

Ted waited outside for one last wave as she drove away. With Barbara's help, he at least had a way to learn more. There were many past events that he now questioned and wanted to explore: his relationship with Maya, the Aunt Jemima apparition and the ghost of Miss Flowers, Volmo's visits, the visions of global destruction, the night of fog, the missing time, and the desert underground facility where humans were corralled like cattle. He was healing now, and before long he would be ready for the next regression and whatever revelations it might bring. With a last glance across at the field where the UFO had landed, Ted's resolution strengthened.

"I will have my life back," he vowed silently to his abductors. "I will dig so deeply into my past that every single thing you've ever done to me will be revealed. When I make my story public, when I tell the world the truth about your alien agenda, only then will I be fulfilling the real role of a Light Worker. And when I help to strip away the masquerade of the angels, working with others to find the truth, maybe it will, finally, set us free.

A Message from Ted Rice

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